

GETTING OUT:

A National Framework
for Escaping Human
Trafficking for Sexual
Exploitation in Canada



**Covenant
House**

COVENANT HOUSE
TRAFFICK STOP
Sharing Knowledge to End Sex Trafficking



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INTRODUCTION

Exiting sex trafficking can be a long and arduous process, with survivors having many needs that must be addressed before, during and after exiting. Often this process takes many attempts.

To date, very little work has been done to document the process survivors must undergo in order to successfully escape from sex trafficking or to document their specific needs while attempting to do so.

The following pages detail the findings of a national research project conducted in eight Canadian cities: Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Niagara Falls, Thunder Bay, Montreal, Halifax, and St. John's. Through a combination of focus groups and interviews, we spoke with 201 stakeholders from 147 organizations, including service providers, healthcare professionals, police, and most importantly, 50 survivors of sex trafficking.

This research project sought to answer five key questions related to exiting the sex industry:

- 1 What is the process of exiting sexual exploitation?
- 2 What are the major barriers to escaping sex trafficking?
- 3 What basic, instrumental, and psychological needs do survivors have when exiting sex trafficking?

- 4 At what point in the journey are certain needs more pressing?
- 5 How does this process vary by regions in Canada?

This report explains that when exiting situations of sex trafficking, survivors face numerous structural and systemic barriers, while also contending with complex psychosocial and psychological factors. In addition to highlighting these barriers, this report outlines the multiple basic and service needs of survivors when they are exiting/escaping and proposes promising service philosophies for working with survivors.

This report aims to provide guidance to service providers (including frontline agencies, health care providers, first responders and child protection agencies) so that they can better understand the unique and complex needs of those who have survived sex trafficking.

In addition to answering the five questions, this report calls for a long-term, coordinated national effort to:

- Recognize the structural barriers that put individuals at greater risk of sexual exploitation, including experiences of poverty, colonialism historical trauma, and discrimination;
- Increase coordination between social services agencies supporting survivors and ensure more funding for programs supporting the unique needs of survivors is available;

- Raise public awareness about this heinous crime, including the signs of luring, grooming and trafficking and how Canadians can better support survivors; and
- Increase dialogue across municipal, provincial and federal jurisdictions to ensure gaps in the system are being addressed.

For a full description of the research methodology, please see **Appendix A**.

WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING/ SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

A great deal of debate and controversy surrounds the topic of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, particularly surrounding the definition and the distinction between concepts such as trafficking, exploitation, procurement (pimping), and sex work in general. Some proponents argue that any participation in the sex industry is inherently exploitative and that no one genuinely consents to perform sexual acts for money (e.g. Miriam, 2005). This may be because individuals are without basic needs or have experienced multiple traumas in their lives, rendering the conditions in which they 'choose' to work in the sex industry constrained. Others argue that participation in the sex industry represents a continuum, with choice and trafficking representing the two ends of the continuum. Our work focuses exclusively on sex trafficking, making a clear distinction between those who are being trafficked and those who participate in the sex industry without coercion. Although there is no nationally endorsed definition of human trafficking, the Government of Canada (2012, p. 4) states:



What is Human Trafficking?

"Human trafficking involves the recruitment, and exercising of control/coercion, direction or influence over... person in order to exploit that person."

Ministry of Public Safety: Government of Canada (2018)

Human trafficking involves the recruitment, and exercising of control/coercion, direction or influence over... a person in order to exploit that person.

We use the term sex trafficking, as human trafficking is a broad term that can encompass other forms of exploitation, including labour, or the harvesting of organs. Individuals that are trafficked for sexual exploitation, including those that participate in the industry under the age of 18 (and as such cannot legally consent), are forced, coerced, or manipulated into performing sexual acts in exchange for money (or substances) (Berger, 2012). Aside from sex, it may also include exotic dancing or the production of sexually explicit images or videos. Sex trafficking can affect people who identify with any gender, or as non-binary. Trafficked persons are often:

- Lured and groomed by individuals they think of as friends, boyfriends or girlfriends.
- Forced to hand over most or all of the money associated with these acts.
- Subject to emotional abuse, violence and threats of violence as a means of control to force continued participation (Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2018).
- Subject to debt bondage as a result of gifts, expensive clothes and drugs that are supplied by the trafficker(s) starting during the recruitment phase.

Sex trafficking is lucrative for those who benefit from the exploitation (traffickers, pimps or exploiters), and the primary motivation is money either for an individual or organized group of individuals (Fiddian-Green, Bridge, & Lioy, 2017).

Crimes related to sexual violence are frequently under-reported. The 2014 General Social Survey on Victimization found that only 5% of sexual assault are reported to police across Canada. Sexual assault was the least likely crime to be reported to police (Perreault, 2015).

Determining the prevalence of sex trafficking in Canada is extremely difficult given the clandestine nature of the activities (Oxman-Martinez, Lacrois & Hanley 2005). However, other barriers to reporting include inconsistent definitions of what constitutes sexual exploitation and trafficking, survivors' lack of trust in authority figures and/or knowledge of services, and the fact that many people who are being exploited do not necessarily identify as victims. Currently, the only available estimates are from those that come into contact with the legal system (police or courts), which is likely a drastic underrepresentation. According to police statistics, 1,099 incidents of human trafficking were reported by police across Canada between 2009 and 2016 (Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, 2018). Between 2005 and 2017, the RCMP Human Trafficking National Coordination laid charges in 455 cases (ibid.) At Covenant House Toronto, we have served 194 survivors of sex trafficking between the years July 2016 and January 2019.

SEX TRAFFICKING AND LANGUAGE

Conducting research on sex trafficking inevitably involves tackling the thorny issue of language, or the challenges present in using terminology that describes survivors' experiences in a sensitive, descriptive, and non-offensive manner. For instance, some survivors in this research were

opposed to the use of the word 'work' when discussing their experience in the sex industry (i.e. sex work). One survivor said:

Please don't tell me it's a job—if you were there you would never say that. It lets me down and ultimately shows me that you actually don't give a rip about me. By saying it's a job or condoning it as work you are also saying the violence done to me is ok, and those who buy me do not have to take responsibility for their actions against me. And you hold the same position as the very people who exploited, beat and humiliated me.

For this reason, if the word 'work' is used in this report, it is with a single quotation mark (sex 'work'). We also use the term 'sex industry' rather than 'sex trade' or 'prostitution', as this term has been proposed by others as neutral (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2014) and is not dependent on whether a person is involved by choice or coercion.

Similarly, describing the topic of this research involved some debate about terminology. Across the country, groups use different language to describe the process of leaving, exiting or escaping situations of sex trafficking. Some find the term 'exiting' problematic as it implies a degree of choice that many survivors do not have when they are being trafficked. Others find it difficult to entirely discount the role that individual agency may play in survivors' attempts to leave the traffickers, and hence are not entirely comfortable with the term 'escaping'. In fact, there is truth to both claims. The survivors that participated in this research have had a variety of experiences. Some survivors were physically detained while others were controlled emotionally and/or financially. For others, a combination of physical and emotional abuse was used to prevent them from leaving.

It was common for survivors to make multiple attempts to leave, seek out help and then return to the traffickers. This was particularly true of survivors who underwent a lengthy grooming process, developed a strong bond with the trafficker, or were trafficked for longer periods of time. In this sense, using the word 'exit' was problematic because it oversimplified what was felt to be a process rather than a one-time event. For instance, one participant states:

Exit to me is you close the door, you move on, you never revisit that. But I think to me it's I've recovered, right.

Some participants described exiting as a process of recovery or a journey. Other participants found the word 'journey' to be problematic. One participant said, "It wouldn't be a journey, I would call it a nightmare", feeling the word journey to have a positive connotation, such as a vacation or an adventure.

In light of these myriad experiences and debates, we use a combination of terms including 'exiting', 'escaping', 'leaving', and 'ending' the experience of sex trafficking. The terms are used interchangeably

in this report, with the caveat that the use of any of the words does not discount those experiences that are less congruent with the term being used. Moreover, we do not wish to diminish the exploitative nature of the trafficking experience by implying leaving is simply a matter of choice. This terminology is used to discuss the process of removing oneself from the control of a manipulative, violent, and/or an emotionally exploitative third party, such as a pimp, trafficker, or a group of traffickers. 'Exiting' is often a non-linear process and may result in multiple attempts. The complex trauma associated with sex trafficking results in enduring and disruptive emotional distress, and as such, recovery generally takes a long time and requires extensive support.

RECRUITMENT/GROOMING

The ways in which survivors are recruited into sex trafficking vary, but most often begins with psychological manipulation referred to as the process of grooming. This may occur by peers, friends, or individuals posing as romantic partners. Grooming can happen online or through face-to-face contact. Traffickers may recruit directly or use individuals in their networks, including others that

HOW GROOMING AND RECRUITMENT HAPPENS



The trafficker may appear in a romantic capacity



They may offer friendship, drugs or a place to stay



Traffickers often lure people by offering a job or lucrative employment



They may offer a partnership in the sex industry, or lie about the job

are being exploited. Most traffickers look to establish relationships of dependence through exploiting vulnerabilities or fulfilling the needs of survivors (Smith, Healy Vardaman, & Snow, 2009). For instance, if a survivor needs love, the trafficker may pose as a romantic partner. If a survivor is homeless, the trafficker may offer housing. One survivor speaks about her trafficker meeting an emotional need by giving her the praise that she craved:

I took my first trick, and he was so genuine about it, and he looked at me and said, I'm so proud of you. He said it because I told him when I first met him, that all I ever wanted was for my parents to say that they are proud of me. So it didn't matter who said it, or what they're proud of me for, somebody was finally proud of me. I was finally good at something. I was never going to walk out that door. Because they gave me something I was longing for my entire life. That's what we need to understand. It's more than that roof over your head, or that money in your pocket. It's that you were lacking something in your life, and that trafficker found out what it is, and was giving it. Why would I walk out that door?

O'Connor and Healy (2006) describe four stages of the grooming process, which may or may not occur in every case: ensnaring, creating dependence, taking control, and total dominance. In the ensnaring stage, the trafficker is very charming and often showers the potential victim with gifts and attention. At times a romantic relationship may develop, where traffickers ensure the victims fall deeply in love. At this stage, traffickers seek trust. Other times survivors are introduced to a seemingly glamorous lifestyle filled with parties and luxury items. One survivor speaks of this:

And the gangs came into effect, I was hanging out in these gang houses... you'd be sent out to the corner by your so-called friends, and they'd befriend you and groom you. And you know it all looked luxurious at first, you know you'd have the booze, you'd have the parties, you'd have the drugs, you'd have the clothes. You thought you were fitting right in and then I guess at that time of my life that's what I was looking for, that affection, that attention. You know, things that I wasn't getting at home.

In the second stage, dependence, traffickers begin to isolate the survivor and become more possessive. The trafficker may get survivors to change their names or get a tattoo. The next stage, taking control, is characterized by the trafficker establishing complete control over the survivor. For example, they may tell the survivors where they may go, what they must wear, how to do their hair or makeup, and when they may eat. The trafficker may even begin to threaten or use violence against the survivors while making demands that they prove their love. By the fourth stage, total dominance, traffickers may convince survivors to remain locked in houses or other locations. During this stage, the trafficker often convinces the survivor that they must make money and that selling sex is the easiest way to do so.

Brayley, Cockbain and Laycock (2011) describe other grooming behaviours including normalizing sexual behaviour by making explicit jokes, frequently speaking about sex, and viewing pornographic materials. Traffickers may also disorient survivors by giving them drugs and/or alcohol and frequently alternating between pleasant and unkind behaviour.

CHANGE IN THE SITUATION

At some point the trafficker becomes:



Unfair



Coercive



Controlling



Manipulative



Violent and/or
abusive

While the 50 survivors we interviewed in this research were diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly vulnerable groups were overrepresented including Indigenous, female-identifying individuals, the majority of which grew up in low-income families. Many of the survivors came from the child welfare system. A startling number described experiencing abuse as a child, particularly sexual, and were recruited very young, often before the age of 16. This is consistent with the research which shows that young females who are poor, marginalized (including culturally and socially) with troubled family histories are the most vulnerable to being exploited (Barrett, 2010; Wilson & Butler, 2014). One service provider elaborates on this:

Part of the reason, or one of the barriers to leaving is that you have to look at who these traffickers are targeting in the first place, it's young girls, young boys who are lacking something in their lives. Someone to mentor them, [or they have] an addiction, a mental health issue. Traffickers are experts at driving a wedge between whatever support systems or whatever structure people have in their lives to drive that wedge in, to push them away, to get them to come to them. What are the reasons that people decide that this is a better choice—compared to what I was currently doing, or where I reside?

INVOLVEMENT IN THE SEX INDUSTRY

The experiences and length of exploitation vary greatly. Most survivors are trafficked domestically, sometimes moving to multiple cities or provinces. For instance, participants in Montreal spoke about survivors being moved from Montreal to other areas in Canada where their French culture is considered 'exotic'. Other survivors are moved across different towns and cities, including where there are large industries, such as oil and fishing, or where there is a high number of tourists.

In general, the sex industry is less visible than in previous years where a large number of sex workers used a 'strip' or red light district. The industry now largely operates through posts on the internet, and in hotels and private units. It should be pointed out, however, that the street-level sex industry is still present in many cities across Canada, and this has created somewhat of a hierarchy among those involved in the industry between those that solicit 'indoors' or 'outdoors', with the latter being considered the bottom of the hierarchy. Race adds an additional element to this hierarchy, with Indigenous women who 'work' at the street-level feeling like they are at the bottom of the barrel. One Indigenous survivor speaks to this:

I think the biggest issue was for us Indigenous women or for someone who say is blonde and blue-eyed or whatever term you want to use, is that for our women, we tend to be or thought as the \$20 hookers that on [street name] or we're the back-alley hooker that's standing in the west end... And our life holds no value... I think any woman that's standing in the west end and in the north end are standing on that street, your life means shit versus those in the rub shop or an escort agency. You're somewhat of a classy hooker I guess. And I'm using those terms because I don't want people to put any value on them. I want them to sound as degrading as they make us feel. I think there's a hierarchy like there is in any type of business, same with exploitation. You're still not worth

much but your life means a little bit more depending on how you're exploited.

EXITING/ESCAPING

The survivors that participated in this research described exiting, escaping, or leaving the traffickers in multiple ways. Some spoke about saving little bits of money for long periods of time and fleeing when they had the chance. Some called 911 or were referred to support services/victim services when the police made a 'bust'. One spoke about the trafficker "taking on another girl", and not making the conscious decision to leave. A couple of survivors spoke about slowly "tapering down" their involvement with the sex industry over a period of several years. For instance, one was able to escape her trafficker but kept a few "regulars", and another became an exotic dancer.

MOST SURVIVORS EXIT BECAUSE OF A TRIGGER EVENT, WHICH CAN INCLUDE:



Having a child and wanting to ensure the child's safety



Physical or mental illness



Violence



A police bust



An opportunity arises to escape/exit



A friend gets hurt, goes missing or is murdered

FIRST RESPONSE

Service providers, law enforcement and/or medical staff are likely to come into contact with survivors during a trigger event. This presents an opportunity to intervene, develop a relationship with the survivor and provide them with referrals or support. Showing compassion and responding without judgement at this critical time can make a difference in whether survivors feel they have the support to attempt an exit.

Here is what first responders can do during a trigger event:



Healthcare

Notice the signs of sex trafficking



Police

Refer to support services



Child protective services

Offer whole family support



Community organizations

Understand the basics of trauma-informed care and practice it throughout service provision

TRIGGER EVENTS

In many cases, a serious event occurred in the survivors' lives that triggered an attempt to exit. For some this event was an act of violence by a trafficker or a 'john', having a friend in the industry go missing or be murdered, or experiencing severe physical or psychological illness. The most commonly reported trigger event in this research was for the survivors to become pregnant, or for something to happen that involved their children. The survivors who felt compelled to exit because of their children spoke about wanting to provide a safer life for their kids. One survivor shares the story of her child being kidnapped by the trafficker and how this pushed her to escape:

But it took for that [child being kidnapped] and for me knowing and risking my life, knowing that I was risking my life to actually get out.

It was either, I'm getting out alive, or getting out dead, but I have to get my baby back one way or another. That's how it went down.

FIRST RESPONSE

It is often during these trigger events that service providers, law enforcement and/or medical staff come into contact with survivors. During this contact, they have a unique opportunity to intervene, develop a relationship, and provide referrals or support. This may occur through outreach or the survivor reaching out for help. Regardless of the way contact is established, this initial interaction is crucial. Generally, out of fear and/or mistrust of authorities or out fear of retribution, survivors are hesitant to disclose the situation they are in. Professionals have a very limited amount of time to see warning signs, such as particular injuries or STIs, or the presence of another person who limits how much the survivor

can speak. During this time showing compassion and providing information or a referral to survivors could influence whether they seek support. The way the survivors are treated in these crucial moments can make a difference in whether survivors feel they have the support to attempt an exit. In one exchange between a survivor and a health care provider during this research the survivor says:

Don't roll your eyes at us, please, don't look at us like we're a number, like we're human beings too.

The health care professional agrees and speaks to the important role they can play in a survivor's successful exit:

We learn all about caring and we're in a caring profession, but we really aren't educated around vulnerable populations, all of the trauma that's experienced and how we, as health care providers, then continue to perpetuate that stigma and discrimination by the way we judge people, treat people when they're at their most vulnerable. And that perpetuates you staying in versus you being able to exit.

RE-ENTRY

My journey of getting out was four years, of just trying to get out. A lot of leaving and then coming back, or hiding and then coming back, and then being found and dragged back.

While some of the survivors in this research were successful in escaping on their first attempt, it was more common to hear that multiple attempts were made to exit. This is particularly true for survivors who were exploited for a long period of time and those who had deep emotional ties to the traffickers.

This is consistent with other studies on the topic (Hammond & McGlone, 2014; Baker, Dalla & Williamson, 2010). Several survivors spoke about always feeling vulnerable to going back, even many years after exiting. For instance, one survivor says:

*Like, I look around, and I can still, I can see it. It's so easy to get back into it after you left, so many years, so many years, it's just like, it's just like *claps* like that.*

In the next section, we discuss the multiple barriers that survivors face in trying to escape traffickers. This includes structural and systemic barriers and numerous psychosocial and psychological factors. Each is discussed in turn.



Survivors often don't just exit or escape, they may return to the trafficker or the sex industry.

STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Structural factors are the overarching social structures and social norms that can both make one vulnerable to being exploited and impact the experiences of survivors when exiting. These factors ultimately influence the beliefs, prejudices, and actions of people that survivors interact with, including those who are meant to offer services, support, and safety. This list is not an exhaustive list of structural factors that people face, though it does encapsulate some of the key themes that were repeated throughout this research, including discrimination through colonization, race, gender, poverty, and public awareness and stigma. The structural factors also take on specific characteristics in various local contexts across the country. Each is discussed below.

The importance of acknowledging structural implications is that through program design, staff education and theoretical position, we can work as a sector to minimize structural barriers. Those working with survivors, including service providers and system actors, should seek to continue learning about these structural factors and ways that they can minimize them within their own roles.

DISCRIMINATION

Participants throughout the country discussed their experiences facing and navigating discrimination related to colonization, gender, and race. Discrimination becomes a barrier to accessing services, but also to participating fully in society.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Structural barriers can be reinforced by people survivors come into contact with including those who work in systems, frontline service providers and even people in the community. These barriers include:



Lack of public awareness



Stigma



Geography and jurisdiction



Racialization



Gender



Colonization



Poverty

In this sense, survivors spoke about how this marginalization made them both vulnerable to being exploited and posed barriers to escaping sex trafficking. In this report, discrimination will be considered by looking at examples of structural discrimination, as well as examples of the way that survivors experience discrimination on a day-to-day basis. While these structural factors are placed into discrete categories for the purpose of this report, many survivors spoke about their experiences of navigating multiple and intersecting structural barriers in their processes of exiting.

Discrimination is an action or a decision that treats a group of people poorly for reasons such as their race, age or disability: these reasons, also called grounds, are protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRC, n.d.).

COLONIZATION

I think lots of our systems are structured in a way that is built on colonial ideologies that are meant to actually exploit vulnerable people rather than really help them.

In this research, a disproportionate number of survivors identified as Indigenous. This is consistent with other research on sex trafficking in Canada (Ontario Native Women's Association, 2016). Any attempt to address sex trafficking in Canada must, therefore, address the historic and ongoing colonization of Indigenous Peoples. Many participants highlighted the connections between the residential school system, discrimination in the child welfare system, intergenerational trauma, and the treatment of Indigenous people in the legal system as formidable barriers to Indigenous survivors.

Residential Schools and Child Welfare

A few of the survivors in this research were either placed in residential schools or had parents that were. These survivors spoke about the impact that residential schools had on Indigenous Peoples' sense of identity and connection with their cultures. One survivor speaks about her experience in a residential school:

I felt shame to be an Indigenous woman... When I was put in residential school, culture shock, everything was different. Now I have to speak this language, now I get soap in my mouth because I'm speaking Ojibway. It was very, very traumatizing for me. So that's where it [the shame] all came from... It didn't come from being raised in a bush, it started when I went to residential school... they put me in residential school so I can assimilate—made to live like a white person. When that was done, it's like I was already damaged.

The child welfare system has also played a lingering role in the discrimination of Indigenous people. From the 1950s to the 1980s, in a period called the 60's scoop, approximately 20,000 Indigenous children were removed from their families and adopted outside of their home communities without contact (NCCAH, 2009). The link with the child welfare system persists, as in many jurisdictions, a disproportionate number of children in care are Indigenous. A recent report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2018) found that in Ontario, Indigenous children under the age of 15 make up 4% of the population and represent 30% of the children in foster care. In Manitoba, it is estimated that 90% of the 10,000 children in care are Indigenous (Office of the Children's Advocate of Manitoba, 2016). Similar complaints have been studied, discussed, or formally launched

through human rights tribunals in provinces across the country. One survivor speaks about the over representation of Indigenous children in care:

They don't bring in culture; they don't ask the kids for their opinion. They're just taking them. I think today is modern-day residential school but it's for the kids. We have how many kids in care?

Intergenerational Trauma

In their study of intergenerational trauma, The University of Calgary, the YMCA, and other stakeholders in Alberta define the concept as:

The transmission of historical oppression and its negative consequences across generations. There is evidence of the impact of intergenerational trauma on the health and wellbeing and on social disparities facing Indigenous peoples in Canada. (Noormohamed et al., 2012, p. 4).

For instance, intergenerational trauma likely affected those who experienced the abuse and violence of the residential schooling system, or 60s scoop survivors, who were struggling with their own trauma when they had children. In this research, it was not uncommon to hear Indigenous survivors speak of multiple generations of their families being placed in the child welfare system, or struggling with poverty, addictions, and mental health concerns. These experiences highlight the connection of disruptive policy and practices on the lives of multiple generations of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Several Indigenous participants in this study discussed the impact of intergenerational trauma. For instance, one survivor's experience of exploitation began in child protective services.

This survivor felt that her experiences were "normalized" by witnessing her parents and other's in her community engage in the sex industry. Similarly, another participant described being trafficked by members of her family and attributed this "family history" to intergenerational trauma. When a trafficker, or abuser, is part of a survivor's extended family, exiting can be even more difficult because of the cultural importance of this network for Indigenous communities. One participant described it as:

Another layer (as) to why women don't just leave or exit is... the intergenerational stuff, intergenerational trauma, not just growing up poor but there is a whole family history behind (connected to) that situation.

Experiences of Discrimination

Several Indigenous participants described recent experiences of discrimination. For instance, one survivor speaks about her experience accessing services while appearing "more white" compared to "more Indigenous":

With the hair, when it's dyed [blonde], I look more white. And I saw so many people be judged way worse than me, or they would pull me out of line and like bring me to the front, and I was like—no... they got here before me.

Another survivor discusses her experience in a store, being followed by security, a form of racial profiling:

Me and my daughters were just in [the store], and my daughter is 13 years old, and she has some money that she's been saving to get some make-up brushes, and she was going to purchase them and they were like \$80. And a security guard was following us down every aisle.

These are examples of the way that individuals act based on racist ideas and harmful stereotypes, which affect the day-to-day experiences of survivors. These types of discrimination result in the exclusion of Indigenous people in Canada from full participation in society.

GENDER

Gender discrimination and gender-based violence were underlying themes in every participating city in this research. Participants discussed how patriarchal norms and cultural expectations of gender roles contribute to the victimization of those being trafficked, including the historical notion that women are 'property' that can be bought by men. Some survivors felt betrayed by the people paying for sex (who were mostly men), including some who are in positions of authority. One survivor discusses the violence perpetrated at the hands of (some) people who pay for sex:

There's a lot of them you see on the street, a lot of them here and there and everywhere. So I think it doesn't matter who you are, us women—they (men) will want to take advantage of you—oh look at that woman walking alone, stop by and get in my car... they're predators, just like birds of prey, they drive around everywhere looking for prey trying to find, especially the younger people.

Women who are exploited can be faced with abuse and violence from both the traffickers and those paying for sex. In one city, the gendered patterns of violence and inadequate response by police brought forward the feeling from one participant that, "We're failing women".

Some of the survivors felt that violence and abuse against women had become normalized to them

after their own prolonged experiences. This was reinforced through messages they received from their communities and from the stereotypes about the sex industry, gender, identity, and exploitation in which they were socialized. One participant that works with survivors speaks about having to challenge the ideas of survivors whose worldviews have been shaped by their experiences:

[Some of the survivors] say things like, "Oh well", [excusing behaviours] about men and you do actually have to challenge that... by assuring [the survivors] that there are good men and they don't buy women and they certainly don't buy young girls.

Participants also discussed the challenges that gender norms can create for those who are either male or LGBTQ. Discussions included the role of male and LGBTQ-specific services and the lack of visibility in considerations of exploitation and sex trafficking. For instance, one participant stressed the large scale to which trafficking occurs for young men, with a disproportionately small number of services available for them. Another participant discussed the challenges associated with (particularly older) transgender clients who have internalized guilt related to their gender and sex 'work'.

Men and transgender people were underrepresented in this study and there is space for further research that focuses on the complexities of heteronormativity and patriarchy in experiences of sexual exploitation. Overall, participants asserted that there is a need for more services for men and people who identify as transgender who face exploitation.

RACE

Additional consideration is required for survivors who are racialized or belonging to non-white socio-cultural groups. One survivor speaks about the importance of having staff that understand the nuances of racism and trauma:

With those racial pieces even some of the nuances with trauma... (the trafficker) not letting my skin get too dark, because then I couldn't be marketed to certain ethnic groups, and then some of the (skin) bleaching that occurred, so for me those... aspects were kind of negated because that person assisting me had no clue how to address it.

This trauma can have a lasting impact on survivors' self-worth, self-esteem, and identity. Another participant speaks about how she has received the message throughout her life that her life is less valuable as someone who is racialized:

Society tells me white young girls are valuable way above me as a visible minority and till this day, my minority status is valued less than whites.

The feeling of being “valued less” can influence the decision of survivors to report crimes to police, to self-disclose, and to seek support after being trafficked. It is important that survivors who have been racialized have specific supports to address the ways they have encountered trauma and discrimination within their experiences of sex trafficking.

POVERTY

Poverty is related to sexual exploitation in at least two ways: first, individuals living in poverty are more vulnerable to being exploited, and second, many survivors are faced with the undesirable

decision of either having their basic needs met by the traffickers or attempting to escape and live in poverty. American researchers Carpenter and Gates (2016) have written about the relationship between the lack of economic resources and a heightened risk of human trafficking. Traffickers may use the prospect of an economic ‘opportunity’ or a lucrative ‘job’ to recruit, lure, or groom people by being misleading about the nature of the ‘work’ or proposing the sex industry as a way out of poverty. One participant in Halifax speaks of traffickers recruiting in Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia:

I think of our Indigenous communities, our Mi'kmaq communities and I think about the level of impoverishment in those communities and you know, so what is there to go to? And a legit reality in that sometimes, I don't want to say that there's not a better option, that there's just so few other options at all, you know, especially when there's a lot of poverty in Nova Scotia.

Survivors everywhere in the country outlined their hesitancy to exit their exploitative situations only to end up living with poverty and financial instability. Many also spoke about the pressure of being responsible for supporting financially dependent children and other family members. One participant speaks about how facing poverty can make survivors being exploited feel hopeless:

Understanding that money, that money's huge, you're going to take her out and she's going to live below the poverty line, so what the hell is the point?

While being exploited, survivors are typically subject to economic coercion, where traffickers take at least 50% (often more) of earnings (Carpenter & Gates, 2016). Despite this, survivors are generally

provided with their basic needs as well as many luxury items such as designer clothes. One service provider speaks about this:

So even though they are not keeping the cash, it's going through their hands. It's this they see how much goes through their hands and they're "rewarded" with other lifestyle things. Like the snapshots I get from some of the girls in like restaurants that I don't ever go to, like look at the restaurants that their pimp is taking them to and constantly the hair and the makeup and the nails.

Prevention of sex trafficking, therefore, ultimately means addressing poverty and investing in communities. One participant reflects on this:

[Ending sexual exploitation] takes money—higher welfare rates, living wage—there needs to be a total change in the way wealth is distributed.

Similarly, another participant points out how the lack of active community development creates vulnerability among residents and suggests this is an important space for prevention:

And so we're not being proactive. If we'd address poverty in communities and, you know, invest money to build that up... cause it's from the ground level [that we address trafficking].

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND STIGMA

When survivors are exiting they often are faced with the lack of public awareness about sex trafficking and a powerful stigma against people engaged in the sex industry in general. One participant speaks about the lack of awareness she encounters in her work:

I know when we started doing prevention... there was a perception from parents that this is not our girls, this is not our community, this is not an issue that we had and this would never happen to us, right? And so breaking that down... you know, understanding the vulnerabilities and helping to educate people on that, is a huge first step, I think, and then understanding the whole progression through and then you get to why they're not leaving, right?

The lack of public awareness means that the general public often does not understand the warning signs that sex trafficking is occurring. In addition, popular misconceptions and stigma make it harder for survivors to reach out for help, fearing they may be judged. Several participants talked about the popular misconception that everyone in the sex industry is there by choice and can leave whenever they choose. One participant elaborates on this:

I think that the—a vast majority of the general public will see exploitation as a choice. So why am I going to go out and get involved when somebody is choosing to do that because they're not seeing it as exploitation. They're seeing it as a choice.

A lack of public awareness and understanding of sex trafficking makes it less likely for the government to respond either because they too are unaware or because of a lack of public pressure. It is important that services are provided to everyone who is engaged in the sex industry, without stigma, regardless of whether they consider their work to be consensual or non-consensual. Furthermore, it is important that the public understands that not everyone in the sex industry is there consensually. More awareness is needed for the public to understand the signs of coercion, violence, and exploitation.

JURISDICTION AND GEOGRAPHY

In each jurisdiction, local contexts and geography played a role in experiences of sex trafficking and the barriers to exiting. This was influenced by the size of the city or community, police jurisdictions, and proximity to international borders.

LARGE URBAN AREAS

Given their sizeable populations, large urban areas in Canada are known to be 'hot-spots' for sex trafficking (this is not to say it does not occur in smaller communities). The large cities we visited were more likely to have a wide variety of services available for survivors, including some specific to working in the sex industry and sex trafficking. They were more likely to have a specialized police unit, trained police officers, and a crisis response protocol, although many rural and smaller communities are also starting to develop these services.

These large urban areas were also more likely to encompass a variety of neighbourhoods and communities, including some that are fraught with violence and other issues. The communities that survivors are embedded within, whether it be their home or a place they have moved to, can influence their safety and ability to exit. For instance, one survivor spoke about being unable to accept a subsidized apartment in specific neighbourhoods when offered by a housing worker, in order to avoid a trafficker. Participants also expressed concern with neighbourhood violence including stabbings, shootings, and gang activity. Some survivors grew up in neighbourhoods where trafficking or the sex industry was prevalent or normalized, while others were confronted with further exploitation when they

attempted to find safety in a new large city. One survivor describes the violence that pervades the street environment:

I hope that what comes from this is that we network and we network people and agencies that are aware of the violence that's on the streets right now. And I was saying earlier we're not just being picked off by johns and pimps and perverts, we're being picked off by kids who are being initiated into gangs... and the level of violence that's on our street right now has multiplied.

Larger cities also have more hotels, rental condos, short term rentals, or apartments that make it more difficult to determine where trafficking is occurring. In larger cities, it can also be easier for traffickers to blend in and not attract attention.

RURAL, REMOTE AND LESS SERVICED REGIONS

Stakeholders in rural and remote communities may face challenges when attempting to locate services and supports for survivors. Most communities do not have sex trafficking-specific services, and some do not even have emergency shelters. Often, first responders will have to seek out services or connect survivors with services outside of the jurisdiction in order to provide support. A participant who lived in a less serviced region discusses this challenge:

Like, as a first responder, where do I take an individual other than to a hospital or a domestic violence shelter? Right? There are no other options that I'm aware of.

Smaller cities, as well as cities with tight-knit communities, may pose additional challenges for survivors 'starting over' due to the lack of anonymity. For instance, one survivor attempted to flee to a shelter, only to know the taxi driver who took her there. She was worried that the taxi driver would tell others where she was. The survivor was fearful that not only would the trafficker know her location, but others would know of her situation. She spoke about this challenge of everyone "knowing that she was being trafficked", and facing stigma from the community. This survivor speaks of the challenge of having no safe place to go:

It makes it hard for safe places to go because everybody knows everybody and everybody's going to say where you were... There's no safe space. So sometimes a lot of us are sent out off... but they lose any sense of community they had or family or friends or whatever. And everyone knows your business, everybody.

Many survivors are required to leave their home communities to seek support. Leaving home communities may protect survivors from the immediate risk of retribution from the trafficker, however, many survivors also lose contact with their natural supports, such as friends and families.

Many of the medium-sized cities that we visited in this research including Thunder Bay, Niagara Falls, Halifax, and St. John's spoke about the rural and remote communities that surrounded their cities. Despite the stretched resources in these medium-sized cities, survivors often had to leave

their communities in order to access whatever services were available. Survivors often travel for hours to get to one of these locations, if they are able to find the transportation to do so. This puts even more strain on already limited resources. One participant speaks about the desperation of trying to leave a remote community:

And the only way to get things going—it's a fly-in community, there's no road access there and you feel trapped there when—like for example, when I had three years ago I wanted to get out of there as soon as possible and the only way to get out of there was by plane and who's going to pay for my ticket and where do I stay? That was a big issue there when I don't—when I didn't feel safe. It was very scary... you've got to go and put them on a plane. Well, this is full, this is full, this is full, you know, and sometimes you got to wait for a few days before you get on a plane... I've worked with some youth who've talked about how they've even used like suicide attempts or overdosing on medications to leave a northern community because then they can get airlifted [flown by helicopter] into the city. It's a suicide or an addictions issue but really the youth are using that [as a reason] to safely get out of the community.

Once survivors are in a new city, participants warned that they continue to be vulnerable to exploitation. Traffickers often seek out those who are unfamiliar with the city, are isolated, or seem like "easy targets":

And they physically know how to identify a northern child compared to an urbanized child you know by hair, their haircut, if they have an accent, if they're speaking their language, the clothing they're wearing is very different in the north than from living here in the city. So they're just such, you know, easy targets... that might be easy to befriend or looking for friendship, they know.

Finally, participants highlighted a lack of training opportunities related to human trafficking available in medium-sized cities. Service providers often have to spend agencies' limited resources in order to travel to large cities for specialized training.

SPLIT POLICE JURISDICTIONS AND INTERNATIONAL BORDERS

The intersection of various police jurisdictions in many communities can provide a way for traffickers to hide from detection. Some jurisdictions may have multiple police services that operate around the city, which can include local police, RCMP, provincial police, and border services. Sometimes gaps in coordination between police agencies may allow trafficking to operate without attention, or for traffickers to avoid 'heat' by travelling a few kilometres outside of the city. The RCMP or provincial police outposts may be spaced far enough that significant time is taken to travel to the outposts of remote or smaller communities. This makes it easy for people to avoid police and receive a significant warning prior to police arriving in some regions. It also makes it more challenging to carry out proactive investigations in small communities when people can move away from a location long before the police arrive. Participants also spoke about traffickers moving survivors through a route between cities that may include Niagara, Hamilton,

Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. Traffickers do so in an attempt to evade police services that jurisdictionally may focus on only one city, and also in order to capitalize on new 'johns'.

While many survivors of sex trafficking have been trafficked domestically, some traffickers may also use international borders to avoid law enforcement. Traffickers may hold United States citizenship allowing easy border crossing if they feel that there is too much 'heat' in Canada. It can be difficult for police to alert the US border if they are unaware of the trafficker's citizenship, real name, and/or don't know the specific vehicle that the trafficker is driving.

ENCOUNTERS WITH SYSTEMS/ SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Throughout their attempts to exit, survivors generally encounter multiple systems. While many of these systems can provide valuable resources and supports to survivors, they may also pose barriers, making the exiting process more challenging. In this section, we discuss the legal system, the health care system, child protection services, the immigration system, and the non-profit sector.

SYSTEMS BARRIERS

Survivors often interact with multiple systems, all of which create opportunities or barriers. These include:



Non-profit sector



Legal/justice



Immigration



Child protection



Health

THE LEGAL SYSTEM AND CRIMINAL CODE

According to the Government of Canada (2016):

“Six offenses in the *Criminal Code* specifically address human trafficking:

Trafficking in Persons (section 279.01): which carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a mandatory minimum penalty of 5 years where the offence involved kidnapping, aggravated assault, aggravated sexual assault or death, and a maximum penalty of 14 years and a mandatory minimum penalty of 4 years in all other cases;

Trafficking of a person under the age of eighteen years (section 279.011) which carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a mandatory minimum penalty of 6 years where the offence involved kidnapping, aggravated assault, aggravated sexual assault or death, and a maximum penalty of 14 years and a mandatory minimum penalty of 5 years in all other cases;

Receiving a Financial or Other Material Benefit for the purpose of committing or facilitating trafficking in persons—Adult Victim (subsection 279.02(1)): Which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment;

Receiving a Financial or Other Material Benefit for the purpose of committing or facilitating trafficking in persons—Child Victim (subsection 279.02(2)): Which carries a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment and a mandatory minimum penalty of 2 years;

Withholding or Destroying a Person's Identity Documents (for example, a passport) for the purpose of committing or facilitating trafficking of that person—Adult Victim (subsection 279.03(1)): Which carries a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment; and,

Withholding or Destroying a Person's Identity Documents (for example, a passport) for the purpose of committing or facilitating trafficking of that person—Child Victim (subsection 279.03(2)): Which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment and a mandatory minimum penalty of 1 year”

Changes to legislation related to the sex industry were implemented as a result of a case brought before the Supreme Court by Terri Jean Bedford, Amy Lebovitch, Valerie Scott and the Pivot Legal Clinic. The Supreme Court of Canada found the existing laws related to 'prostitution' were unconstitutional and put sex 'workers' in unnecessary danger (*Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford*, 2013). The new legislation related to the sex industry focuses on the 'demand side', making it illegal to pay for sex and sexual services, and removing the criminalization of the survivor or sex 'worker'. This has been referred to as the Nordic model, as it is based on the implementation of similar legislation in Sweden and other Nordic countries.

Some participants in this research expressed frustration at the way that exploitation is understood and challenges that they have faced in attempting to navigate the new law. The Canadian Criminal Code in sections 286.1 to 286.3 makes exchanging money for sexual services punishable by up to five years in prison while providing provisions for fines, imprisonment, and either summary or indictable offences. However, in the case of people who pay for sex from someone under the age of 18, the Criminal Code asserts a mandatory minimum sentence of six months for a first offence and one year for subsequent

offences. Participants in this research described encountering several other barriers with the legal system, primarily through the court process and having a criminal record. Survivors also described having mixed experiences with the police.

COURT PROCESSES

In an audit of criminal cases related to sex trafficking, Ibrahim (2018) found that out of 306 cases, only 84 (27%) involved Human Trafficking as the most serious offence. Of those cases, 60% resulted in a stay or were withdrawn, and 30% resulted in a guilty finding. Of those found guilty, 64% were sentenced to custody and prosecutors frequently proceeded with less serious charges. Comparatively, 65% of all cases related to prostitution and 51% of cases involving violent crimes resulted in a guilty finding (Ibrahim, 2018).

Participants in several cities discussed challenges with the current legal system, expressing a lack of clarity in the legal definition of human trafficking as a major barrier. Survivors spoke about their hesitancy to press charges because of the low conviction rate. This perspective was echoed by some service providers who are hesitant to encourage survivors to pursue charges against traffickers for this reason, and because the process

of going to court can be lengthy and traumatic. Participants expressed how hard, emotionally challenging, and embarrassing it is for survivors to testify in court and to be cross-examined by defence attorneys. As many charges do not result in convictions or lengthy sentences, survivors must also contend with the fear of retaliation from the traffickers or their peers. One participant expands on the experiences of fear and regret a survivor expressed after charging a trafficker:

So the one guy that we put away for six months, he's out now and she is constantly calling me, she's like "I think I've seen him, I think I've seen him, oh my god oh my god oh my god", I'm like "calm down, breathe" and she's like "I can't" she can't leave her house... she's like "why did I do it? Six months, what am I doing?" You know she's embarrassed herself in front of everybody because she's had to share her most horrific details, you know and she sat there for what?

Considering this potentially traumatizing process, some accommodations can now be made while testifying, including having survivors testify on tape or having a screen in place so they do not have to face the traffickers. Participants in this research spoke about the need for specialized Crown Attorneys and training for other legal figures, such as judges. Some participants also spoke about how the court process can be empowering for survivors who get to experience holding traffickers accountable for their actions. This experience, however, generally occurs with survivors who are further along in their recoveries.

CRIMINAL RECORDS

Many survivors have a criminal record as a result of activities they participated in while being trafficked, including drug possession/trafficking, weapons, or human trafficking.

Having a criminal record creates difficulties in obtaining employment, as many places now require a police check to become employed. Many survivors must contend with the lengthy process of getting a pardon in order to work. Moreover, their participation in criminal activities while being trafficked can make survivors hesitant to speak to the police about their trafficking experience for fear of being prosecuted. While police interviewed in this research stated that they try to take into account what survivors have been through, some felt conflicted at times. For instance, one police officer speaks about the duty of the police, and the fine line they face in taking survivors' history of victimization into account:

It is, it's an obstacle for us. We've charged—we had a survivor/victim and she was trafficked by the middle girl. What do you do about that? Like what morally... it can be tempered at sentencing, or tempered by a judge. But, it's a balancing act. Especially at that stage, you got the young victim, 20-year-old female trafficker is being controlled by gang banger or trauma. What do you do? Ultimately, you want this guy—you could use that middle person, but you don't just turn a blind eye to that middle person, because then you're victimizing the third person... It's tough then, because I mean most likely if you look into the trafficker's history—at some point, they've probably been victims of some horrific things too.

THE POLICE

Given that human trafficking is a criminal charge, police play an important role in enforcing the law. Participants in this study described having mixed experiences with the police. Some felt that the police were non-responsive, did not take them seriously, or judged them for being in the sex industry. For instance, one service provider speaks about the survivors she works with trying to get help from police:

I've had women say to me that they've gone to police to highlight predators as well as serial killers, and their voice was not responded to... She was looked upon as a "hooker". Your voice doesn't matter and it wasn't explored and how many more women had been murdered after this?

Apart from causing additional risk to vulnerable communities, the lack of action by police reinforces feelings of betrayal and breaks trust with survivors. Another survivor describes how her previous experience with the police resulted in her feeling hesitant to report acts of violence committed against her:

I was raped in my apartment and it was because I would not accept this guy as a client. Did I call the cops? Nope, because I know what would have happened: "Are you sure you were raped? Are you sure it wasn't a client that just didn't pay you?"

In contrast, other participants spoke highly about their encounters with the police, suggesting that when police work to establish a rapport, the outcome can be very positive:

My big thing, and sometimes I hate to admit it, but I always go back to the police. There were these two police officers, tweedle dumb and tweedle dee, they were my constant, no matter what the weather was, how sick I was. How high I was, how beaten up I was, where I was... They were consistent, they were familiar, no matter who would come across my path, throughout the days, seeing those two familiar faces with the same bad attitudes and the same bad jokes... to have one thing constant and good... there was nothing I appreciated more in my struggle than to know that tweedle dumb and tweedle dee were going to come around that corner at some point in that night and they were going to give me a hard time. I'm here because of two asshole cops. I tell you.

In general, the survivors' experiences with the police tended to be better when there was a unit dedicated specifically to human trafficking, or officers that were trained on this issue. Unfortunately, this varied across the country, with some police departments being mandated to respond to human trafficking in addition to other crimes, such as child abuse in general, and for one jurisdiction, all organized crime. One police officer spoke about the need for more training among police officers, and that while they still have a long way to go, they are getting better at developing relationships in the communities they work in. One officer states:

I completely understand the lack of trust in police. Like I understand, I really, really do and you know what? There's people that if an officer was responding to my grandmother's I'd be like oh, God no send someone else right? But then so many want to do good work and

we really value the lived experience... but I think for us to make some changes in the right direction we really need to hear it from the people who have been there... But again a lot of it comes back to trust, right? And that's not something that's going to happen overnight.

THE NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

We're a very reactionary based system and I think a lot of awareness gets raised because there's things that come up in the media with young women going missing, being murdered and then realizing that okay, well, they were exploited. So now we realize that there is this systematic issue, but it's all because someone died and that sucks. Like we shouldn't have to wait until tragedy strikes to start raising awareness for things. Like these are conversations that should have been happening years ago. Instead we waited till, you know, we lost kids, or we lost women and men and then we said oh, there's a problem and well, that problem didn't just pop up out of nowhere.

Many Indigenous participants in this research spoke about their heightened mistrust of the police and the legal system. This mistrust increased for many during the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Children (MMIW). Survivors and service provider participants who work with Indigenous peoples throughout Canada discussed challenges with the national inquiry process, including the coordination of emotional support after testimony, ownership of data, and the overall stress of providing testimony.

People who are street-involved and engaged in the sex industry, including those who are trafficked, are particularly vulnerable to being victimized. For this reason, the crisis related to murdered and missing Indigenous women in Canada is one of the most pressing issues related to sex trafficking. There is a need for further research, regulation, practice, and policy change based on the results of the MMIW report. Participants in this research pointed to the gaps that need to be addressed in the missing person reporting process, particularly the large oversights that can occur when missing persons are Indigenous and/or involved with the sex industry. Unfortunately, a couple of survivors in this research described going to the police only to be ignored. One participant discusses her experience filing a missing persons report:

I just had to make a domestic (missing person's) report two weeks ago. And the police didn't even follow up with me. They ended up going to the person I put the call on before they even investigated... they don't take it seriously. I don't know if that is because I'm Indigenous or if it's because of the area I live in.

HEALTH CARE

Survivors often have pressing health needs when exiting and while in the sex industry. The response of health professionals can have a large impact on the survivors, influencing the quality of the treatment they receive, their trust of the health care system, and whether they seek out help in the future. It is important that health organizations such as walk-in clinics and hospitals work towards eliminating stigma related to the sex industry, substance use, and human trafficking. Throughout Canada, participants had a variety of experiences in health settings, many of them negative. One survivor speaks about her experience accessing health services while in crisis:

I was messed up. I was a freaking mess. I was 17 years old with a baby in my belly, asking them to save my life. They looked at me like what? I'm asking for help. Help me. They just stripped me naked, threw me in a rubber room (detox), and wished for the best... You know, it was the health professionals that judged me because of the situation and that was, I think that was the worst.

Another consistent challenge for survivors occurred in jurisdictions with a shortage of family doctors or general practitioners. In several communities, survivors are forced to rotate between going to emergency rooms and walk-in clinics to access medical attention. This makes establishing a relationship with a supportive doctor, or health care workers, a challenge. Survivors in St. John's and Thunder Bay, in particular, struggled to access regular health care providers, even if they were in immediate need. One participant describes both the stigma that survivors can encounter and the difficulties they face in securing a family doctor:

They looked at her and said 'we don't have time to talk to a person like you, a girl like you.' They have no one at the hospitals to talk to you. Then if you don't have a family doctor then you're going to walk-in clinics and it can take a couple of years to get a family doctor here in town, right? So you're relying on walk-in clinics for your medical.

One survivor, however, mentioned that despite having a family doctor, she continues to seek some health care from a sexual health clinic, rather than disclosing her involvement in the sex industry to her regular doctor who she felt would judge her. The combination of stigma and limited access to care poses a challenge to survivors who may have

immediate needs related to sexual health, injury, and physical health linked to their experiences while being exploited.

Survivors also reported having a difficult time accessing dental care without coverage. This led to experiences of pain and discomfort. One participant reported having to get teeth removed when a dentist refused to complete a root canal.

LACK OF AWARENESS

Health care professionals are not necessarily informed of ways to identify a trafficker, or that a person may be being trafficked, in the same way that they may look out for signs of domestic violence or abuse. This is a missed opportunity for intervention and potential support while someone is being trafficked. Several participants discussed the importance of training health professionals on sex trafficking so that they are more sensitive to survivors, are aware of the signs that someone is being exploited, and can provide information to survivors on where they can go to access services.

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Child protective services were discussed as a systemic barrier in two ways. First, some survivors discussed the fear of having their children apprehended if they disclose that they have been involved in the sex industry or if they lack resources upon exiting (such as housing, money, and food). Second, youth living in care or aging out of protective services are particularly vulnerable to being exploited. Across the country, child protective services were a barrier to exiting and/or accessing services because survivors were afraid that their children would be apprehended. One survivor says:

I think it's, the trust is huge, and reaching out because, especially if you have kids, "they're going to take my kids", that is always my biggest fear and that's why I didn't get a lot of the help that I needed until later in life, and even now I'm very cautious for fear that somebody's still going to walk in and take my two kids.

A few participants commented that they would like child protective services to provide more support for keeping children with their families rather than apprehending the child. This was particularly the case for families whose perceived neglect and abuse is the result of insufficient resources and parenting skills. For instance, one service provider says:

I think there's a fine line between people that need help to succeed as a family versus master manipulator perpetrators who are intentionally abusing their children. And often times, I find that's kind of all mashed together, when it's different. You can have people who are wonderful parents who just need a little bit of extra help.

Several survivors spoke about the pain they experienced having their children apprehended, and the difficulties they faced trying to get them back. In particular, it was difficult for many survivors to find a sufficient source of income outside the sex industry that provided enough for their children. Some participants discussed losing their children permanently and shared how this made them feel even more hopeless, or that there wasn't a point in trying to escape their exploitative situations.

Sadly, in some cases, children that are apprehended are not placed in a healthier environment than the one they left. They are also exceedingly vulnerable to traffickers looking to recruit young

people into the sex industry. Indeed, many of the survivors in this research have a history of involvement with child protective services, and one survivor disclosed that she was recruited in a group home. Several participants discussed traffickers targeting youth in care or in group homes, or even using other youth in foster care to recruit others. One participant elaborates:

So the child welfare system, in terms of kids that are crown wards, it's very difficult to find them consistent home placements. And, they're teenagers, so they don't want to be there... So, they're moving them very frequently and they're meeting folks that are involved in the system in the trade. So, they're being groomed by other foster people, as well. "Oh, come and meet my buddy, he's going to make your life better." So, it's like a big circle of kids connecting.

Participants also discussed youth as being vulnerable to exploitation when leaving child protective services with limited resources. One participant speaks about a client's experience:

So I just assisted a young man to get on assistance but you couldn't make a move until he was aged out and by the time he aged out he was lacking the services that he had when he was younger. So come the end of the month he's presumably out of his apartment because welfare has yet to kick in because he was missing a document. So this pushes him back and I'm not sure that we're giving him much choice other than probably he's more geared towards crime than exploitation and he'll get back in the system that way which is really unfortunate.

IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

Survivors who do not have legal status in Canada face tremendous barriers in receiving services, especially if they are afraid they will be deported. Survivors that are immigrants may be particularly isolated without family or friends in Canada, face language barriers, and/or are unaware of where to reach out for help. One survivor speaks about her experience:

I remember the officer just told me, “Go and get help”, where, how? I don’t know how to ask for coffee, I don’t know how to ask for help... I don’t know who’s going to help me because I encountered the police at some point and I just—I was more afraid of the police than my trafficker because I didn’t know how to react or what to say.

In addition, immigrants that seek help might face additional stigma, particularly regarding stereotypes that they are attempting to live off the government or ‘abuse the system’. Another survivor speaks about some people assuming that even if they are immigrants being trafficked, it is still better than the situation they were leaving in their home country, or even blaming the survivor for their predicament: “*You choose to come here, so it’s your fault if that crime happens to you*”.

NON-PROFIT SECTOR

While the non-profit sector is often critical to providing support to survivors as they attempt to exit, the lack of coordination between services and ongoing funding concerns pose tremendous barriers to survivors. Coordination among service providers is important as survivors often have multiple needs and will require service from the agencies with the necessary expertise. Collaboration is required between the police,

health care and housing providers, mental health agencies, and substance use agencies, among others. One service provider elaborates on this and speaks to the even larger concern that many services are not equipped to handle the complexity of survivors’ needs:

The biggest barrier for getting help for anybody is people can have multiple issues, so they’re experiencing trauma, they might be bipolar, they might have an active addiction and they’re expected to deal with one thing at a time, and that doesn’t work. So, not only do you not have coordination with all the agencies, but then each agency is like, we only are going to deal with mental illness right now, you’ll have to deal with your addiction another day, make another appointment, go on that six month wait list before you deal with that one today. So, there’s that inability to deal...

The communities visited in this research varied from having organized systems of care to little or no coordination. Participants in the communities that were relatively coordinated recommended that survivors have one case manager that can work with them to navigate the various services. Agencies must also consider how they share information with one another, finding a balance between respecting the privacy rights of survivors and not requiring them to continually repeat their stories to every agency they seek services from.

Participants discussed philosophical differences and a lack of funding as the primary reasons for a lack of coordination. Indeed, many agency participants highlighted this latter challenge. Organizations are often struggling to remain afloat, let alone extend their work to form cohesive partnerships. In addition, concerns

regarding funding can pit agencies against each other, as they seek the same funding streams. Many agency participants felt that they were carrying increasingly large caseloads with limited resources. A few respondents spoke about how many funders are interested in innovative pilot projects, but that it can be difficult to obtain continuous funding. One service provider shares this experience:

Yeah, so we start making great changes, people start to trust us on a community level, or the people that are entrenched or survivors, and then it's like, oh sorry, the service isn't there anymore, my bad. So yeah, I struggled.

If possible, organizations should continue to work together in order to secure joint grants, looking to build on specific areas of expertise. Similarly, municipalities and government should look at facilitating continued support for survivors.

PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

In addition to structural and systemic barriers that influence survivors' processes of exiting or escaping, survivors are also influenced by a number of psychosocial factors. Psychosocial factors are the social, or social environmental, considerations that influence emotional wellbeing (including interpersonal, family, and peers) (England, Butler & Gonzalez, 2015). Four psychosocial factors were identified in this research: Isolation, adapting to mainstream life, trust, and being recognized from their time in the industry or their 'past life'.

ISOLATION/SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK

Having a support network, including family and friends, can be an enormous asset in supporting survivors to escape traffickers. Unfortunately, many survivors become isolated from their families and friends when they are trafficked, and for some, their families were either complicit in their exploitation or were the perpetrators. This isolation

can be heightened for survivors who are brought to different locations while they are trafficked. One participant states:

One of the barriers to exiting is isolation. If you're a 15-year-old girl from Kenora or Thunder Bay, and you find yourself in Niagara Falls, you have no money, no cell phone, no ID, no support system, no relatives, no one to go to for help, no one you know who you can go to.

As a result of being isolated from friends and families, many survivors develop strong bonds with others that are in similar situations. This may include the network the trafficker is part of or other survivors. Several survivors spoke about their connection to their 'street families', describing them as the only people who genuinely understand each other, having been through similar experiences, addictions, and trauma. Some survivors expressed feelings of even greater isolation and guilt when attempting to escape

PSYCHOSOCIAL/COMMUNITY BARRIERS

Exiting can mean having to find a new community, starting over alone or with little community support. These barriers include:



Isolation



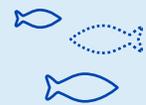
Being recognized as a survivor



Lack of trust in others



No social support network



Difficulty adapting to 'mainstream life'

and thereby leaving behind their 'street families'. Survivors also worry about what might happen to their friends. One survivor elaborates on this:

I felt like I was betraying my dearest and best friends, my street family; that I was abandoning them and I promised that I wouldn't. I felt I was leaving them to the torturers.

ADAPTING TO 'STRAIGHT' LIFE OUTSIDE OF THE SEX INDUSTRY

To try somehow or another to fit, to experience something the whole world sees as normal, because in our minds, we are not normal. We are different, we are distinctively different, and we know that, and we feel that and we walk around feeling distinctively different inside, but wanting to be normal.

Adjusting to life outside of the sex industry, often referred to as 'straight life', can be difficult for some survivors. A few survivors spoke about how they struggled to fit in or belong anywhere after they exited. For instance, after an attempt to leave they felt estranged from the traffickers and/or others involved in the industry, but also did not feel like they fit in with the mainstream culture. Some of the transitions may include being awake during the day as opposed to the night when they were previously 'working', and adapting to cultures of mainstream employment. One survivor spoke about not knowing how to present herself at work, feeling like she was "rough around the edges", and using language that might be offensive or inappropriate for the workplace. A few survivors spoke about experiencing difficulties with seemingly mundane activities such as eating dinner with a group of people at a table, deciding what clothes to wear, or how to have basic conversations with others outside of conversations about sex. One survivor elaborates on this point:

Life is scary. Surviving is easy, you know? It's predictable. You know what to expect out there. You know how to survive in that lifestyle. You come into the real world, and it's like I don't know the way to bank, I don't know how to grocery shop, I'm walking down the street and people are going to their jobs and they're—making small talk. How does somebody make small talk, you know? Like things like that are the most difficult things for me to adjust to.

One service participant spoke about how survivors are exposed to an entirely different culture while they are being exploited, with its own set of norms and values. He cautioned that those that work with this population must remain aware of this, and avoid "prescribing" particular activities that the mainstream considers to be "normal":

And when they exit or were pushed out or escaped, that's all they knew how to base their self-worth on is how much they can earn in a day. And so we, our minds [service providers], have these beautiful service plans. "Oh, this is going to work for you." It's not going to work for you because we're not taking the time to completely understand or even acknowledge that this is its own culture. And we're asking them to reintegrate or re-socialize in what we think is normal. And that's a constant barrier.

TRUST

It can be extremely difficult for survivors to trust other people, particularly service providers or institutions such as health care and the police, during and after their trafficking experience. The grooming process can change the worldview of the survivor, including being taught not to trust 'the system', and only the trafficker. In turn, survivors may feel confused and not know who to trust when they are betrayed by the trafficker. The lack of trust is amplified for survivors who have children and are worried about apprehension by child protection. Sadly, as previously discussed, several survivors described their experiences with various systems such as health care, the police, child protection, and other services, that gave them a reason to not trust others. One participant describes the interaction between survivors and the various systems:

They [survivors] need somewhere safe, that they know they can be trusted to tell their story of what's going on. Like, they really need that, because there's nowhere they can go. You can't talk to the police; you can't talk to doctors because they look down on you. They put you down to the ground—oh, that's nothing, that's just trash. You know, wait until the end of the shift, and give it someone else. It's not like they're humans, they should not be treated that way.

This mistrust is one of the largest reasons that service providers must work to establish a rapport with survivors. To this end, it is important that service providers do not make lofty promises to survivors, but are as genuine and realistic as possible. One service provider says:

I think I heard a few girls say that it's hard to reach out to even get help because the

people that they're accessing almost mimic the grooming process, I'm going to sell you a dream, "I'm going to make this world great. We're going to get you counselling, we're going to get you this, we're going to get you that" and it's very hard to trust and believe because it goes back to their initial trafficking grooming. So that's what I find is one of the hardest, is just they don't trust in what is being offered to them.

RECOGNITION FROM THE INDUSTRY OR 'PAST LIFE'

Several survivors shared the concern that people in the community and on social media remembered them and could identify them from their involvement in the sex industry. For some, this included the lingering presence of explicit photos online that were previously used in ads. Other survivors spoke about encountering previous 'johns' in the community, or for one, while in recovery at a treatment centre for addiction and mental health. Other survivors spoke about their children being taunted by others for their previous involvement in the sex industry, and one survivor spoke about her children using her past life against her during moments of anger. Another survivor spoke about not being able to secure employment or housing because of the stigma associated with her past involvement in the sex industry. Survivors described these experiences as triggers that can lead to severe anxiety, depression, guilt, and shame. These experiences can even make it tempting to return to drugs or to give up on the 'straight life'. One survivor states:

So now all of a sudden the question is, what's the point of leaving? Like, if this is just something I'm labelled as my whole life?

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

I've said it a million times, I would sit and take a beating and physical torture and pain that I went through every day and I'd do it a million times over again, that's not what kept me there. It's the emotional side of it, it's the beating down of a person, it's tearing apart who you are. That's what fucks me all up.

While the barriers to exiting discussed so far are tremendous, participants in this research discussed psychological factors the most frequently. Psychological factors are the mental and emotional considerations that affect the exiting or escaping process. The psychological factors identified in this research were: Identifying as a victim, past and

current trauma, the trauma bond, substance use, fear, complicity/guilt, hopelessness, and self-value/self-esteem.

IDENTIFYING AS A 'VICTIM'

While those who work with survivors may be able to point to warning signs that an individual is being exploited, it was very common for survivors in this study to state that they did not think of their experience as exploitation until years after exiting. One survivor states:

INDIVIDUAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Psychological factors are the mental and emotional considerations that affect a survivor's exiting or escaping process. These include:



Trauma bond with the trafficker



Hopelessness



Self-value/self esteem



Complicity and guilt



Substance use



Identifying as a victim



Fear



Past and current trauma

I didn't understand the gravity of what was happening to me. My biggest barrier was truly me. Blaming myself and taking ownership of what was happening to me because they were "MY CHOICES" (emphasis in the original text given by survivor) as I tried to fill the God-shaped hole in my chest.

Indeed, the term 'human trafficking' is largely foreign to survivors while they are being exploited. Survivors who have been recruited or groomed at an early age and have a strong emotional bond to the trafficker may feel that they are acting on their own free will and hence may not identify as a 'victim' until after that bond is broken. Many feel that they are helping out the trafficker, or their boyfriends, by making money. It may be particularly difficult for those who have participated in survival sex without a trafficker or someone controlling them in the past to differentiate their experiences. Other survivors spoke about having an extended history of sexual trauma and abuse in their lives, and for them, their sexual exploitation through trafficking was described as 'normal', and they found it difficult to contemplate a life outside of this hardship.

One survivor spoke about how she had trouble believing she was trafficked because, in her mind, a typical 'victim' is white and conventionally pretty. As a racialized person, she found it difficult to identify with this image. Survivors may also have a hard time accepting support if, under duress, they had participated in illegal activities including the recruitment of others (which will be discussed further below).

This has important implications for those who have contact with individuals who are currently experiencing sex trafficking or who are doing outreach. Service providers cannot always wait

until survivors can self-identify as being exploited before trying to establish a relationship. Similarly, asking them if they are being 'trafficked' or 'exploited' is unlikely to register as true to them, and it is best to ask direct questions, as one service provider states, such as, "are you ever locked up sometimes?", or "does someone control your money?". A few survivors spoke about learning they had been exploited after receiving services from a community agency, often for another concern such as mental health or addiction. Those who made this discovery discussed how difficult it was emotionally when the reality of their experiences hit them. One survivor states:

The most traumatic thing for me personally was after 20 years of being exploited and thinking some of it was choice and some of it was not was sitting down one day and realizing that none of it was my choice from start to finish, middle, anywhere—that was the most traumatic thing that ever happened to me in my recovery. Having that realization. Everything else was hard, everything else sucked really bad, the recovery, the rehabs, everything else, but that was the worst moment of my life in recovery.

Another survivor recommends having additional support on hand for survivors when this realization occurs, as it can be a "really tough moment".

PAST AND CURRENT TRAUMA

While it was not universal, the majority of survivors in this research described experiencing multiple and reoccurring trauma throughout their lives, beginning as children. This included poverty, neglect, and multiple forms of abuse, particularly sexual. This is consistent with the literature

related to sex trafficking (Wilson & Butler, 2014; Roe-Speowitz, Hickie, & Cimino, 2012; Landers, McGrath, Johnson, Armstrong, & Dollard, 2017). Sadly, several of the survivors we interviewed spoke about being abused by their closest family members, and a few even disclosed being trafficked by their family members. We also interviewed residential school survivors and children of residential school survivors, as well as many who detailed their traumatic experiences growing up in the child welfare system. Unfortunately, the experience of trauma frequently continues for survivors while they are being trafficked, with survivors often being subjected to unspeakable violence and emotional distress. One survivor states:

You see so much violence when you're out there on the street. I don't know how many times I got picked up and beaten up by johns. Or, you know, left to die.

The impact that this early trauma has on cognitive and emotional development, as well how individuals form attachments and relationships with others, is well documented (Putnam, 2006; Spates, Samaraweera, Plaisier, Souza, & Otsui, 2007). It is also common for trauma to result in multiple symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety, amongst others (Putnam, 2006; Spates et al., 2007). Many survivors spoke about their mental distress and how it creates barriers to leaving the traffickers. Mental distress often continues to plague survivors after they exit. Several survivors spoke about strong suicidal ideation, and some made several attempts on their lives. Others spoke about struggling with dissociative tendencies, likely the result of using this as a defence mechanism when experiencing trauma and throughout their time in the sex industry. Healing from this trauma is a lengthy and painful process and usually requires years

of support from professionals. Many survivors described coping with trauma as a life-long process rather than something they ever fully recover from. Part of the process includes experiencing triggers, learning to work through them, and receiving ongoing support.

TRAUMA BOND

In light of the multiple forms of trauma many survivors experience in their lives, they are vulnerable to developing relationships with traffickers who fill an emotional void by making them feel loved and taken care of. As discussed above, the grooming process often results in survivors developing intense, romantic attachments to the traffickers, despite the presence of danger, exploitation, and betrayal (Carnes, 1997). These feelings have been referred to as the 'betrayal' or 'trauma bond'. Attachment generally occurs after a period of kindness, or the development of a relationship that feels genuine to the survivor. This kindness may continue to exist, usually intermittently, between acts of betrayal or abuse.

Trauma bonds can be extremely durable and are difficult to process. Carnes (1997) states:

The trauma-bonded person has constructed a story that explains the initial involvement and rationalizes the continued involvement. The story has powerful reason for what happened and powerful hopes for change. Sometimes this story is a variant of the perpetrator's story of promise, sometimes not... the critical factor is the embedded conclusions come from the victim, and for that reason it is particularly difficult to overcome (p. 122).

The language used to describe this bond varied throughout the country, with some participants discussing parallels with domestic violence attachments, Stockholm Syndrome, and some referring to the process as “love bombing”. The trauma bond is a frequently described barrier for survivors who are attempting to exit and is often at the root of why many survivors return to the exploitation after exiting. One survivor speaks about feeling guilty after exiting:

That was more important to me... That sense of belonging, that being loved, that being wanted, that being needed, was way more important to me, than having a roof over my head, you know? That kept me there more than that. I knew how to survive on the street. I just wanted to be loved; I wanted to be cared for... that psychological hold, like unbelievable. I didn't leave, and when I did leave, I felt guilty. Like they took care of me, they really did.

Breaking this trauma bond is very difficult and requires intense support for survivors. One survivor describes the internal dialogue she experienced after her trafficker was arrested and she was receiving services from a community agency:

He's my boyfriend, not my trafficker; he's not my pimp, he's my boyfriend. Even after an arrest has been made and police are involved, he's still my boyfriend. He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, it just happened to be people he knows, he's not gang involved. These are the kinds of conversations. He's got to go to court but it was just the wrong place at the wrong time.

SUBSTANCE USE

Survivors frequently use substances, either to cope with their trauma and/or as a means of control by traffickers. Traffickers often use addiction as a pretext to encourage survivors to “go out and make money”, particularly if there is a strong trauma bond. A couple of interview participants pointed out that not all substance use is voluntary, or precedes a survivors’ involvement with a trafficker, although this certainly does happen. In some cases, however, traffickers purposely get survivors addicted to substances as another means of control. One survivor shares this experience:

I found myself in Toronto, and I had such migraines, and I found myself I had missed my flight, and this guy just offered to help me until I could get a flight, and he gave me something for it, and I was 16, I didn't even know what it was, and like a week and a half later, suddenly I feel awful without this, you know... But I had never done drugs before that... But that's how he held me, and then I tried to leave, then I got chained, for months.

Some traffickers intentionally become a survivor’s drug supplier in order to create a chemical dependency. In some situations, traffickers also participate in drug trafficking and can use their connections and the threat of violent repercussions to ensure that no one else provides substances to those under their control. This leaves survivors even more dependent on the traffickers.

Several participants described their substance use and sexual exploitation as being strongly interconnected. One service provider states that ‘exiting’ or recovering from one issue often means addressing the other at the same time:

There's the journey to sobriety, and there's the journey to exiting and the interconnection between the two. And it's not even what came first, sometimes one's supporting the other.

As many survivors use substances to self-medicate, looking to numb the feelings associated with the multiple traumas they have experienced, two vicious cycles can be created in their recovery process: How do survivors address their trauma without their main coping mechanism, and how can trauma possibly be addressed if they are 'numb' from this substance use? Furthermore, how can the survivor successfully exit if through their addiction they remain vulnerable to returning to the trafficker or to participation in the sex industry? It is for these reasons that a harm reduction approach to substance use is often necessary for survivors, which will be discussed further in this report.

FEAR

One of the most common psychological barriers to exiting sex trafficking described by both survivors and service providers is fear. Fear was referred to in three ways: Fear of the repercussions from traffickers, fear of the unknown, and fear of not being believed. Each is described below.

Fear of Retaliation

Traffickers may threaten to harm the survivors or their loved ones if they attempt to leave. This fear becomes a powerful control mechanism to keep survivors in exploitative conditions. Many survivors feared physical violence, even for their lives, if they attempted to leave the traffickers. Some had previously experienced physical and/or sexual assault from traffickers and were avoiding a recurrence. Some survivors spoke about being

even more fearful for their loved ones, with traffickers threatening to come after parents, children, or their street family if they left. One survivor elaborates on this:

I was under so much control. I wanted to leave, I did, but I had nothing. I don't know how to do that; he will kill me and my family. He'll kill my children. He made it quite clear, very much so.

While some participants conceded that they were not sure if traffickers would carry out their threats as it could lead to 'more heat' (i.e. police attention), this fear is strong enough to keep many survivors from escaping. After an exit or escape attempt, several survivors described feeling afraid for a long time, even avoiding going outside or continuously "looking over their shoulders" for the traffickers or anyone that knows them. One survivor comments that all service providers should know the following, "Please know I was scared/ afraid ALL the time, for a long time afterwards".

Fear of the Unknown

When survivors leave a trafficker they often have to leave everything behind including items to meet their basic needs and access to their support networks. Several survivors in this research described this process as starting their lives over again and for those with no resources, family, or community supports, this is a very scary concept. One survivor describes this fear as:

The fear of the unknown. If I walk out this door, where am I going to go, where am I going to sleep, where am I going to get my next meal, and who is ever going to love me again, you know?

In addition to these immediate concerns, survivors are often afraid of how they will make money in the future, how they will support their families, and worry about being isolated without friends or other supports. Facing so many unknowns can be overwhelming for survivors, causing them to stay with the traffickers. In fact, three participants in this study used the expression “*better the devil you know, than the devil you don’t*” to explain how fear of the unknown can keep survivors seemingly trapped in their situations.

Fear of Not Being Believed

Finally, survivors may fear that no one will believe them if they come forward and share their experiences, or that no one will understand what they have been through. This includes law enforcement. Unfortunately, a couple of these survivors described experiences when they attempted to report a physical or sexual assault and the police did not believe them, largely because they were seen as putting themselves in these situations as a result of being a sex ‘worker’. One survivor speaks of this fear:

I was a child, he was an adult, he was believed and feared, and me... I was just a kid who couldn’t prove a damned thing... I just stayed running.

COMPLICITY/GUILT

Often when survivors are being trafficked, they are coerced into performing a variety of criminal activities, including trafficking or recruiting others into exploitation. Some survivors spoke about their roles in the industry, that in order to “climb the ranks”, they were compelled to participate in the recruitment and/or “training” of others. Traffickers may keep evidence of other criminal activity committed under duress as a threat to survivors.

These survivors reported feeling trapped and feared that if they reported or left the traffickers they might face legal repercussions. For instance, one survivor shares what her trafficker said to her:

You’re taking drugs, you’re holding drugs, you helped me deal drugs, you help me traffic property, you helped me do that robbery, you helped me steal that car, if you go to the police and say that I’m trafficking you—guess what, I’m going to tell them that you did—this this and this, and you’re going to be in just as much, if not more trouble than I am.

Survivors often face intense feelings of guilt about participating in these activities, particularly recruiting other people into sex trafficking. A few survivors spoke about carrying this guilt for a long time after exiting, even if the activities they participated in were for their own survival. For instance, one survivor says:

But now coming out and knowing what I know, the guilt I feel is... it’s a bit worse than my room time, you know what I mean? So it’s very, very difficult that people when you’re serving them, like we’re not just saying, “Oh you’re a victim”, actually you’re not always only a victim, often times there’s a complicity to it and that guilt and shame is so difficult and you have to be able to get to that too.

HOPELESSNESS

Thinking about all of the barriers to escaping, in addition to the thought of starting again, many times without resources or supports, can make survivors feel hopeless that they will ever get away

from the traffickers. Some of the concerns that survivors faced were related to a combination of the following issues: addiction, trauma, housing, income, social supports, and a lack of knowledge of community supports. Even when considering employment, survivors expressed concern about having to account for large gaps on their resumes from when they were being trafficked. This prevented those survivors from applying for jobs in the first place. For survivors who had made multiple attempts at escaping and were not successful, this hopelessness was even more pronounced. One survivor states:

I think that the barriers to leaving, the bottom line actually is hopelessness. There's no sense getting out really if there isn't anything for you in the future... It's not necessarily always the external, it's not there isn't a house, or any of those things, it's, 'what am I going to do when I get there? I've already tried 10 times'. You know what, I wasn't successful 10 times already, why do you think I'm going to be successful this time because I sure as hell don't.

SELF-VALUE/SELF-ESTEEM

I could feel so horrible, I have nothing, I'm just the lowest low and dirt. Then, how do I climb out of there and start helping myself? Where do I begin?

As mentioned above, some survivors reported experiencing traumatic experiences throughout their lives, predating the experience of being trafficked. In this sense, it is not surprising that many described having very negative conceptions of themselves, or low self-esteem. This not only creates a vulnerability to being exploited, but

it also creates a cycle where survivors receive attention and positive praise from the traffickers based on how much money they make, and even from their 'johns' for being 'chosen' and feeling wanted. One survivor describes this:

And there's something to that, like affirmation of somebody wanting you, of somebody paying for you, of somebody, you know, wanting to spend their time and money on you. That also fulfills something in you, and that's hard to replace. That's really hard to replace.

There is a deep social stigma associated with the sex industry. Some survivors internalize this stigma and feel a deep sense of shame, which affects their self-esteem. Traffickers can use these feelings of shame against survivors by threatening to share intimate details with families or friends. Mostly, however, survivors spoke about their own embarrassment and feelings of shame as preventing them from leaving, fearing judgement and ridicule.

Several survivors spoke about feeling worthless, that they were not capable of doing anything other than 'sex work', a narrative sometimes repeated by traffickers. One survivor speaks about how being in the sex industry became deeply ingrained into her sense of self and identity:

It was identity for me, I really struggled with. I had gotten to a point in my life where I decided that if I couldn't be good at being good then I was going to be the best at being bad. And that kind of became who I was, right? And so then who was I if I wasn't that, right? Now I'm broken. I'm damaged. I can't find love. I can't succeed in a career, you know? I'm just a crack whore.

This internalized identity was described by a couple of survivors as being very difficult to shake, even years after exiting. When service providers or other people acted judgementally towards the survivors it felt like a reaffirmation of that internalized stigma. One survivor described seeing a previous 'john' and having him tell her she could never escape as she would always be a 'whore'. She described being devastated and distressed by her own internal dialogue telling her *"he is right"*. This reaffirms the importance of service providers working from an anti-oppressive and non-judgemental lens (discussed further below).

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SERVICE PROVISION

In light of the multiple barriers and psychosocial and psychological factors that influence survivors' ability to successfully exit or escape their exploitative situations, service providers must be very mindful about the services they offer and perhaps, more importantly, *the way* these services are provided. In this section, we discuss promising practices or the theoretical orientations or ideas on the best way to deliver services to survivors of sex trafficking. In this research, the following were identified: Trauma-informed practice, anti-oppressive practice, reconciliation, a stages of change approach, harm reduction, and valuing the voice of lived experience.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Consistent with the literature (Heffernan & Blythe, 2014, for example), one of the most important program considerations identified by numerous participants is that services operate from a trauma-informed perspective. Urquhart and Jasiura (2013) define trauma-informed services as those that "take into account an understanding of trauma in all aspects of service delivery and place priority on the individual's safety, choice and control" (p. 12). This approach is not to be confused with trauma-specific services, where symptoms of trauma are treated therapeutically. Instead, it is an overall

THE FOLLOWING ARE PROMISING PRACTICES IN THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO SURVIVORS



Trauma-informed care



Anti-oppressive practices



Stages of change



Valuing lived experience



Client-led services



Reconciliation



Harm reduction

approach to operations and includes modes of service delivery and agency policies. Working from a trauma-informed perspective means that service providers are aware of the impact that trauma has on mental health and behaviour and are mindful not to cause any further harm or trauma. Agencies can inadvertently cause harm to survivors by asking them details of their trauma repeatedly, by being judgemental, and through the use of punitive policies. One service provider speaks about how to address problematic behaviour from a trauma-informed perspective:

Sometimes we are challenged with our values because we don't give up on our kids. We have holes in the walls. We've had our vehicles stolen by kids. We don't give up on them. Sometimes we get challenged with that and they're like, "Why are you still keeping them? You're just enabling their behaviour." It's like, no, we're teaching them how they can do things differently. We're teaching them personal consequences; [but] we're loving them no matter what. I wouldn't kick out my own kid for putting a hole in the wall. It'll cost me \$2 to fix that hole in the wall. There's no amount of money that's going to cost if I gave up on that kid.

Other key components of trauma-informed practice place relationship building at the centre by offering client-led, strengths-based, and non-judgemental services. Each of these is elaborated on below, followed by a discussion of the importance of staff being attentive to their own wellbeing due to the high risk of experiencing burnout and vicarious trauma.

CLIENT-LED SERVICES

Given the coercion and control involved in sexual exploitation and trafficking, it is imperative that all service providers offer options for survivors rather than prescribed program components. This means that survivors identify their own needs and decide the modality, nature, pace, and intensity of supports they receive. For some survivors, this process can be difficult, as one participant says:

The thing I missed most was my own mind and my own thoughts and I hadn't even been allowed to have my own thoughts for such a long time that when I first started to have—all of a sudden I had to make all these decisions, I felt incapable to do so.

If survivors feel unable to make choices on their own, such as indicated in the quote above, one participant suggested offering small choices initially (e.g. tea or coffee?) and making affirming statements such as, "It's okay, let's explore the options together". As each survivor has had a different experience and may be at various stages of recovery, services must be geared to meet each individual based on their identified needs. The role of the service provider is to ask them what they want, to offer options, and to advocate for the survivors when there are barriers to obtaining their needs or goals. One service provider says:

You have to have a professional perspective to say, "You said this but have you considered this" and not say, "You have to say do this, you have to do this". If I impose and say, "You have to leave and you have to go to a shelter and you have to do this", I just become as controlling as the person you're trying to leave.

STRENGTHS-BASED

Trauma-informed care means working with survivors to identify and focus on their strengths, or the qualities and skills they already possess. For instance, survivors generally have tremendous resilience and survival skills. Others may enjoy music or art, be very compassionate, etc. Focusing on strengths can be helpful in increasing survivors' self-esteem. One service provider speaks about strengths-based services:

So much programming is deficit-driven, like everybody focuses on their deficits. And when you're coming off an addiction or you just finished being exploited and you're finally reaching out for help and then you're talking about all the problems that you have, people forget to focus on like it took a lot for them to step up and ask for help, it's taken a lot for them to be able to exit now or seek out that. So instead of like the deficit-driven programs we are starting to look at the strengths.

NON-JUDGEMENTAL

Survivors often encounter the stigma of coming from the sex industry, and as mentioned previously, may internalize this stigma and experience deep feelings of shame. Anyone providing services to survivors must be free of judgement. They must be prepared to hear stories of the survivors' experiences and receive them with empathy. To provide this service, organizations should consider specialized training and make counselling, debriefing, or clinical supervision available as a staff resource. One survivor speaks of her experiences feeling judged by service providers, and the pain that resulted:

I think we do a walk of shame after you do what you have to do, but then that's a different kind of walk of shame, it hits your soul... to go to an agency and get seen by someone who's supposed to be, you know [there to help you], and then you get that look, well that's a different kind of shame, you don't want to go back to that shame. You can feel, and you can see it... and that resonates. That stays with you a long time.

Voluntary Services

In light of the discussion of trauma-informed care, it is important that services offered to survivors are voluntary. This can be very difficult when young people, even children, are being trafficked. Some have argued that this is a child welfare concern and in some jurisdictions, legislation has been passed allowing some the authority to apprehend those under the age of 18 who are participating in the sex industry. This is understandable considering legally youth are not able to consent to participate and are by definition, being exploited. The problem is that this is a very difficult way to establish trust with the young people, and the process of apprehending and removing their choices can mimic the trafficking experience and add to their trauma. One service provider describes a mandated program in her community:

So when you look at a victim, when you're working with a victim of exploitation, one of our young people, all forms of control and choice have been taken away from them through that victimization. So there's still control where these children should go; it's also a form of exploitation. And in order to help them start healing, you need to return that decision. You need to include them in that process.

Other participants described how with some mandated services, participants are locked up for a period of time, and state this can be very traumatic, even adding to systemic discrimination they may have experienced:

Sadly, what we see within child welfare is that social workers, they tend to go to lock them up. They'll be safe if they're locked up without realizing the added trauma that they're putting on that individual as it relates to the victimization of them now being criminalized and seen as that. When you look at that whole colonization and residential schools and the impacts that still on our people, locking our children up. Well, even for a woman for that matter.

While those who are conducting this work undoubtedly have the right intentions, several participants described how it can create further barriers for survivors, including having those that are apprehended being labelled as “snitches”, and seeing some survivors go to great lengths to avoid being apprehended, including jumping out of windows.

FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

The focal point on trauma-informed practice is the relationship between the service user and provider. Research has shown the development of strong interpersonal relationships to be a key factor in survivors successfully being able to escape situations of sexual exploitation (O'Brien, 2018). As discussed above, many survivors become isolated from their families and friends when they are being trafficked, and are often forced to leave those they have developed relationships with while being trafficked when they exit, including the traffickers. One participant elaborates on the process of building deep relationships:

It's about building trust and deep relationships because if you're just engaging and then withdrawing, you're enforcing a pimp's message. A pimp has always said, "I'm the only one here for you, I'm going to provide everything you need, no one else cares about you" and so when you're not—when you're

not in that relationship with a girl, you're just enforcing all of his messages because if he's right about that, what else is he right about?

Survivors with an extensive history of trauma may find it hard to trust others, particularly those working within institutions. It is important for service providers to work on building trust and developing genuine relationships, with appropriate boundaries, when working with the survivors. Survivors recommended that staff should be patient and work on building rapport as this process may take time. Several survivors discussed how the relationships they developed after exiting was one of the most important factors in their success. For instance, one said:

That's all I needed. I needed somebody to show me that they love me, that they cared about me, that I was somebody worth, you know, hanging out with, or being around, or that somebody believed in me. That was, I'd say, the biggest reason I didn't go back.

[Because for once], people showed me that they cared, and believed in me, and didn't want anything in return, you know? And it seems that every time I made a success, every strength that I had, you know, they boosted my self-worth, my self-esteem, all those things.

VICARIOUS TRAUMA AND BURNOUT

We need to take care of the people that are taking care of the people.

Working from a trauma-informed perspective also means providing support to service providers. Given the intense subject matter and multiple service needs of survivors, service providers are at a higher risk of experiencing burnout and vicarious trauma. This is particularly true for staff with lived experience. One service provider with lived experience elaborates on this:

What you're hearing every single day, the horror stories, the violence, the sadness, the trauma. So the people who are in those positions to help are scarce, right. And so workplaces have to put supports in place for our staff and when you hire lived experience, the support needs to be even greater because of the amount of triggers.

One service provider with lived experience spoke about the difficulty of maintaining appropriate boundaries to prevent burnout because of what she called "survivor guilt". She felt a strong duty to provide services or support regardless of the time of day or her own exhaustion because she received the same support and felt a personal obligation to do the same for others. Another

commented that, "Separation between 'work' and 'personal' life is not possible, the personal is political for many survivors".

Several agency participants, regardless of whether they had lived experience, described feeling exhausted but caring so much about their clients that they worried about turning their phones off or taking vacations in case they went into crisis. For example, one staff says:

It puts you in a hard spot because then—or even our employers say you need to make sure you make time for yourself because you're going to burn out, and I don't know what's worse, not taking that call or taking the call, right?

Unfortunately, many agency participants discussed how limited funding can lead to unmanageable caseloads and prevent staff from accessing support services. One service provider shared that when she had approached her supervisor regarding feelings of burnout, she was accused of not being able to "handle" her caseload, resulting in feelings of inadequacy. Another spoke about having to declare the leave of absence she took due to burnout with the college she was registered with, which she experienced as stigmatizing and a barrier to being hired as a registered professional. Some suggestions to protect against burnout and vicarious trauma included having clinical supervision for staff, having a strong team that can support one another, and promoting a culture at work that allows staff to talk about their feelings of burnout and/or vicarious trauma.

ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE (AOP)

Anti-oppressive practice (AOP) seeks to reduce the systemic oppression that groups who have been marginalized as a result of their race, ethnicity, religion,

gender, sexuality and/or ability have been subjected to. It is a lens in which to view all practices, language, and policies used in service provision. One survivor speaks of her experiences as a person of colour:

I fight every day with the racism, discrimination and overall systemic oppression. When the system oppresses me so heavily it creates conditions for me to become dangerously alienated, disenfranchised and normalizes that existence, my being and my reality are nothing, I am nothing... Systemic oppression robs me of the opportunity to have viable options to choose from, it robs me the opportunity to give meaning to my experiences and robs me of the opportunity to belong in a society where people can see the real me.

Working from an AOP perspective requires service providers to be knowledgeable about systemic oppression and to provide services that do not mimic this oppression. One way to do this is to have staff members that reflect the diversity of their service users. When asked what service providers do that is harmful, one survivor remarks:

Programs that run with entirely Caucasian staff and staff have no clue regarding ethno-racial cultural LGBT nuances or can speak to the concept of “whiteness” when you are a person of colour.

Having staff continually reflect on their practice and monitor whether bias is impacting their decisions or work is also an important part of AOP.

RECONCILIATION

Applying principles and the spirit of reconciliation is important in working with Indigenous survivors. In practice, this requires staff to be aware of cultural and historical practices that have harmed Indigenous people in Canada and to work in the spirit of building trust and respect. While in an abstract sense this looks similar to principles related to trauma-informed care, it also requires organizations to develop a greater understanding of Indigenous culture.

“Reconciliation typically refers to establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this country... there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (TRCC, 2015, p. 6). This definition was used to guide the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which heard testimony from residential school survivors concluding in 2015.

Supporting survivors in reconnecting to Indigenous teachings and providing a safe, non-institutional environment are active ways that organizations can move towards reconciliation. In practice, following the spirit of reconciliation may require a range of responses including, but not limited to: partnerships with local Indigenous organizations, hiring peer workers, revisiting hiring practices, rethinking policy and practice related to service delivery, offering specific resources, and supporting Indigenous survivors through interactions with some of the system’s actors.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was called to hear testimony related to the residential school system in Canada. The report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada made several “Calls to Action” that apply directly to those who work with survivors of human trafficking who identify as Indigenous (TRCC, 2015). In the spirit of reconciliation, it is important that these calls are embodied when supporting survivors of sex trafficking, especially in recognition that Indigenous women and girls experience disproportionate vulnerability as the result of a structural colonial legacy throughout Canada.

Jordan’s Principle is a legal rule enforced by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal which calls for all levels of government to ensure access to services for First Nations children seeking necessary products, services, and supports (Government of Canada, 2018a). Jordan’s Principle was named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba, who stayed hospitalized until his death at the age of five due to a jurisdictional fight between the province and federal government over who would pay for home care (Government of Canada, 2018b).

STAGES OF CHANGE

And it’s been, you know, make a couple of steps forward, make ten steps back, make a couple of steps forward—you know, all that. But ultimately, it’s been providing me with the right support at the right moment.

It is important to acknowledge that for many survivors, the process of exiting or escaping is

not a linear one, and may take several attempts. Some survivors spoke about the healing process taking a lifetime. Services must be available to support survivors regardless of where they are in this process. One theoretical model that is helpful to conceptualize where a survivor may be psychologically is Prochaska & DiClemente’s (1982) Transtheoretical Model or Stages of Change model. While it is not completely analogous, it can be helpful to think about survivors’ healing journeys as roughly corresponding to the stages of change, including pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination, particularly for survivors with a strong trauma bond. For instance, survivors may not believe they are being exploited or trafficked (pre-contemplation), and as such may not feel the need to leave their situation. Support staff must adjust the services they provide to correspond with the stage the survivor is at. In this scenario, staff may work to develop a rapport with survivors, create a safety plan, provide information, and reduce harm where possible. The goal is to keep the survivors as safe as possible and for them to know that there is somewhere safe they can reach out to when they are ready. Once survivors are in the contemplative or action stages, the service plans may change, and options are provided to the survivors which may include traditional case management goals such as housing, mental health care, education, etc. As they move further along, ongoing support may be required for survivors to maintain their progress. One survivor pointed out that service providers sometimes make the mistake of thinking that those they are working with do not need support because they are not in crisis:

People sometimes need the support when they’re doing really well and when everything is stable. And the service provider sometimes will go, “Oh, [name] is doing good. She’s

housed. She's not using anymore. She's going to school every day." And that might be the thing that scares the shit out of me, because I've only known how to be in crisis and chaos.

It should be noted, however, that even for survivors further along in this process, their healing journeys are not necessarily linear, and they may switch between a state of crisis and high functionality intermittently. They may also re-enter the industry at any stage, although they are more vulnerable earlier in the process. Baker et al. (2010) argue that the transtheoretical model does not adequately account for the multiple attempts survivors often make when exiting, and propose a different model with six stages: immersion, awareness, deliberate planning, initial exit, re-entry, and final exit, with the first three stages being analogous to pre-contemplation, contemplation, and action, and the latter three depicting the sometimes cyclical nature of a survivor's attempt to escape the industry.

There are several reasons that it is important to recognize the stage of change a survivor is at in their recovery. First, if a survivor is not ready for a particular service or are pushed too hard towards a goal, they will likely not accept the help being offered to them. One service provider speaks of this:

I can offer you all of the support, compassion, services in the world, but until you're ready as individuals to say "here's my tipping point, whatever that may be" it sounds quite simple... until they're ready to accept help or services, unless you're ready to take it, you won't take it no matter how much it's offered to you.

In addition to not taking the services offered to them, not recognizing where a survivor is at in their recovery can damage the relationship between the service provider and survivor, and can ultimately cause harm to the survivor. One survivor reflects on this:

That day when I had my initial meeting with [service provider], if she had sat there and said, "if you want to do this program, we think you're a good fit, you'll fit into our mandate, but you're only going to be in the program for a year and a half," I would have turned around and walked out the door, because there's no way—and my brain wouldn't have been able to cope with the overwhelming-ness of the expectation in my mind. Like, you have a fucking timeline, and if you don't check off all these boxes by this time, then you're kicked out and you're not worth the effort. That's what the message sent.

This survivor continues to state that it is important to let survivors heal on their own timelines and that they will progress if given the space to do so safely:

I think the biggest part for me has been that when I got into the program, there were no expectations set. There was no like within six months, you need to be doing this and you're going to be off the program within this long... it was 100 percent what do you need right now to make it through today? Then they would offer things to me as I was getting to a point where I was seeking it out and I was saying, "This isn't working for me anymore. I've got to do something. Throw something at me." If she had come to me a year ago, there's not a chance in heck that would have happened. It would have probably made me feel a lot worse and it would have set me back rather than building me up. It's the right timing and letting people work through it.

In this sense, it is important that service providers reflect on their practice and their expectations of the survivors they are working with. Service providers must be aware of the process and not be disappointed in themselves or the survivors if they re-enter their exploitative situations. It can be helpful to reiterate the message that service providers understand the process, and they will be there for them, without judgement, no matter what. One survivor speaks about seeing the disappointment in service providers' eyes and how this made her feel:

So I think that kind of that leaving is a process and so sometimes when you tell a worker you know, "I'm thinking of leaving" but you don't, they get disappointed in you and you can see that in them, you've just disappointed another person, right?

Having the knowledge that recidivism is common, and that some survivors make multiple attempts to leave before they are ultimately successful can help to reduce this disappointment. Several survivors spoke about the importance of service providers being there for them when they reach out to them, regardless of what has happened in the past. For instance, one survivor gives the advice to service providers to, "Let me go when I'm not ready and receive me with open arms when I return".

HARM REDUCTION

People who are actively involved in the sex industry can be exposed to a number of harms including substance use, infections, violence, discrimination, debt, criminalization, and exploitation (Rekart, 2005). Harm reduction refers to strategies for addressing harm-related behaviours. It is often not an 'abstinence approach' (although it does not preclude abstinence), but instead advocates for ways to increase safety on a continuum of possible behaviours. Some of

the strategies used in harm reduction include peer education, training in the use of condoms, providing supplies, self-help, and occupational health and safety (Rekart, 2005). Harm reduction approaches centre on client empowerment, non-judgemental services, and improving safety related to behaviours. In this study, harm reduction was referred to in at least two areas: substance use and the sex industry.

SUBSTANCE USE

This is a harm reduction; this is like rolling up your sleeves, getting into the mud and recognizing that when people are in addictions they should be able to be serviced wherever they are, whenever they are.

There are many services that require survivors to abstain from all substance use before they may access them. This can be problematic for survivors who have used substances as a coping mechanism for the trauma they have experienced. Removing the substances before new coping mechanisms are learned can be harmful and traumatic for survivors. In addition, some survivors may want to escape their exploitative situations, but may not be ready to stop using substances. Rules that require survivors to be sober can prevent many from accessing services. One service provider comments on this:

If it takes somebody to get to a program, and they need to be high, get high. That's going to get you in the door. Because then, we can later work on maybe decreasing that, or adding healthier coping skills, you know?

It is important for service providers to work with the survivors wherever they are with their substance use, including working to reduce harm when necessary.

THE SEX INDUSTRY

There is some debate among service providers about whether they should take an abolitionist approach, the position that sex ‘work’ is never truly consensual and should not be supported at any time. While it is important that services be provided under this umbrella for survivors who are no longer being trafficked (and desire this approach)¹, it is also imperative that those who have not fully exited or escaped have a place to go for support, and for help to reduce harm associated with being in the industry (e.g. safety planning, STI prevention, etc.). This is particularly important for survivors who are still in the pre-contemplative or contemplative stages of change, or for those who do not identify as a victim. Offering services and focusing on building relationships can demonstrate to someone that they have a safe place to go if needed. These services are also helpful for those who have relapsed but still need support. One survivor speaks about what helped her in her recovery:

A harm reduction worker who allowed me space to have trade thoughts, exit thoughts, and moving back to where it happened thoughts, space to build contingency and safety plans and knowing beyond a doubt where to go for help and support no matter where I may go.

VALUING THE ROLE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

Please don’t judge, or pretend to know if you’re not an experiential person. I respect and value your knowledge as an authority, but it’s not the same. We need you both desperately, knowledgeable professionals and experiential persons.

Survivors must play a large role in any program or policy that addresses sexual exploitation. In this research, survivors spoke about valuing the role of lived experience in three ways: by hiring experiential staff, having peer support for survivors during their recoveries, and having experiential advisors for program and policy development. Each is discussed below.

STAFF WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Survivors in every city visited outlined the importance of having service providers with lived experience at the agencies they received support from. Survivors spoke about feeling more comfortable with people who understand what it is like to work in the sex industry, including the sub-culture and the multiple traumas that can result. Several spoke about feeling more comfortable with other survivors as they know they won’t be judged. Staff with lived experience can also serve as role models and inspire hope for survivors who have recently exited or are contemplating exiting. One survivor speaks of the multiple attempts she made to exit, only being successful when she connected with an experiential staff member:

¹ One survivor, for instance, was adamant that this was the approach she needed, “When I was in crisis I needed abolition. I know for certain I would not have safely exited in harm reduction”. It is important that both options are available to survivors.

It was my seventh time [attempting to exit] and the difference was in the shelter they introduced me to the human trafficking case manager who had lived experience and that's when I trusted the process... Up until that point I thought they were not going to serve me the way that I needed them to... they were already putting me in the position where they didn't know what had happened—like they couldn't understand the concept of trafficking, what did I do with the money, why didn't I leave, and all these questions during the interview process. And the trafficking manager came and I knew that we already had a foundational baseline of understanding, she self-identified and she walked me through her experience and that's what changed my life. Because she was there to say she's been through it, this is what it took her, just having someone who went through what I did and being able to say, "You can make it, look at me now. I'm here, things are good".

Several service providers with lived experience spoke about how they had a strong desire to support others the way they had been, and that this assisted in their own healing.

It should be pointed out, however, that some participants discussed the complications that can arise from having service providers identify as having lived experience. One service provider, for instance, felt that she was seen as a person with lived experience exclusively, thereby disregarding many other important elements of her identity, including her formal education and service experience credentials. She also felt that as soon as she identified as a person with lived experience,

some people assumed she was fragile. She describes struggling with continually having to identify as someone with lived experience:

It's not my identity anymore. And I really hope for most people that it's not their identity their whole life, do you know what I mean? It keeps people down, like it being their identity, forever and ever and ever.

Another participant commented that some service providers may have lived experience but may not want to share this with others, and by not doing so others assume she does not understand what the survivors have gone through. While participants were adamant that staff with lived experience are crucial to working with survivors, it was also clear that more work needs to be done so that there is not a divide between formally educated caseworkers and those with lived experience, or to assume that because someone has one credential, they do not have the other. One survivor says:

As a community, we have to get better—and obviously valuing lived experience, but it's very much like it's an us versus them mentality. Like there's people with lived experience and there's service providers where I'm both right? And if I lead in a conversation with I have lived experience I do traditionally get treated much differently than if I lead with I am a case manager, right? Because there's this idea that when you think of someone with lived experience, or someone who's fragile and damaged and that needs to be cared for and needs support where if we truly want to utilize that we need to let people identify where they are.

PEER SUPPORT

Survivors across the country spoke about how the support of peers, or people with similar experiences, has been pivotal to their recoveries. Survivors spoke about the importance of feeling connected to other people who are in recovery. One survivor says:

For me, the people that I trusted most were people who had experienced that trauma or they had experienced that oppression and were upfront with me, those were the people that I identified with. Peer mentorship helped me understand that I wasn't alone and that the thoughts that I was having weren't insane or terminally unique for me, that they were thoughts that other people have.

Some survivors described being able to talk to peers in a way they could not with professionals and appreciated being able to be candid with someone who understands and would not judge them. One survivor, for instance, speaks about the difference between peers and other staff during one of her experiences with relapse:

I used coke one time. I had slipped. And in that moment, the first person that I talked to was not staff; it was a peer. And it was somebody else who I know lives and struggles with that same kind of thing. It took me talking to them and them being like, "Dude..."

Intentionality is necessary in program design and in the workplace to value peer workers, and to respect the unique qualities and roles they play as part of the team. Peer support workers may require specific support and training if they do not have a formal education. When peer workers

are supported, they can play a mentorship role, helping connect survivors with other services. Unfortunately, sometimes peer support workers are not provided with enough support or are seen as external support, which can lead to additional traumatic experiences for the peers.

SURVIVOR VOICE

In developing programs and policies, it is important to include the recommendations and advice from people with lived experience as they have direct knowledge of how particular programs and policies will impact them. One survivor speaks about the value of having people with lived experience act as 'champions' to provide advisory services to agencies:

Honestly, survivor champions, like myself. You could put me in a situation in a room and I can hear what they're not saying, because I have said the exact thing myself. We use a totally different language. We can carry on a whole conversation without saying a word because we've had to... It's not the authorities that piss us off the most, it's the book people who like to tell us what we should and should not be doing because they've learned it from a damn book. Stand on a street corner with your feet beaten with coat hangers and tell me how you read that in a book and what I should be doing to change this... It is time for the survivor champions, those who have survived it, to step forward in these programs and assist these programs firsthand, because we have the information.

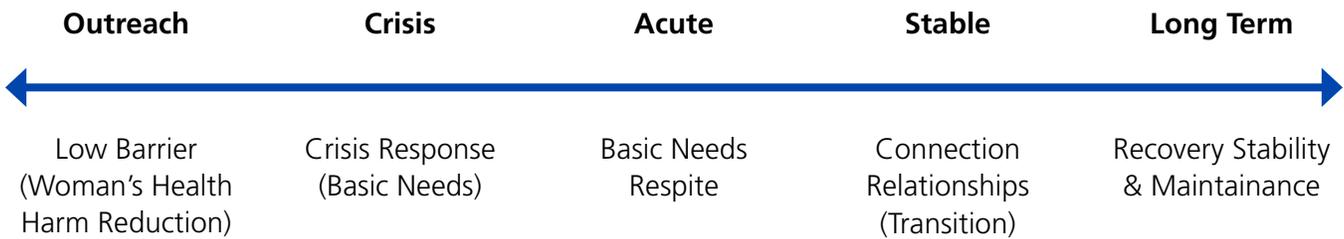
It is essential, however, that this is not done in a tokenistic or exploitative way. This means ensuring that survivors are participating in a trauma-informed environment, that informed consent is provided,

and that they are compensated financially for their contributions. Unfortunately, several survivors spoke about feeling that they were being used for their stories to raise money for organizations or to support a political agenda (that they did not always agree with), and this left them feeling vulnerable and exploited. One survivor speaks about how this vulnerability can last for days after sharing her story:

I know when I share what I'm feeling or what I've experienced I feel vulnerable. And I don't just feel vulnerable for that moment, I feel vulnerable for days to follow. So keeping that in mind is that when somebody is sharing, that follow up just doesn't take place immediately, it takes place for a couple days after just because you're exposed, right? You feel exposed. You feel people now carry a piece of you and the most traumatic pieces of you and also bringing that up because you're triggered. You're bringing your story back up... when you're asking for someone with a voice to come to the table to be really mindful that you pay them appropriately for their story because it's worth it.

SERVICE NEEDS

THE SERVICE CONTINUUM



If survivors cannot meet their basic needs, they may re-integrate into exploitative relationships and trafficking in order to meet these needs. In providing these basic needs, service providers can ensure survivors are well-supported upon exiting.

In this next section, we discuss the service needs of survivors. These include basic needs as well as other service needs, such as case management. Survivors access services along a continuum from outreach to longer-term supports. The type of services survivors require varies on the level of crisis they are in, or where they are in the process of exiting. We have identified five potential points of the exiting process and their adjacent service needs: outreach, crisis, acute, transitional, and long-term. It should be noted that not all survivors follow

the same path. Some are able to utilize supports and reconnect with family and/or natural supports after a short crisis period, while others who have more complex family experiences may require access to more extensive service relationships with organizations. Similar to the stages of change, this process is not necessarily linear, and survivors may re-enter the industry or return to traffickers at any point. It should also be noted that the service needs continuum and the stages of change are not analogous, and survivors may be at any stage of change during the exiting process.

Outreach services are required for individuals who are involved in the sex industry and/or are at risk of being exploited. It is important for outreach services to be trauma-informed, non-judgemental, focused on health care, harm reduction, and establishing a relationship. Having a safe and welcoming outreach or drop-in service that is low-barrier can provide people who are marginalized with a sense that there is support available should

they need it. Since not all survivors of exploitation identify as victims, and those who consider themselves to be consensually participating in the sex industry have the same basic needs as survivors, it is important that outreach services are available to anyone that desires this service.

Crisis Intervention generally occurs during a trigger event or an exit attempt. Here service providers should look to address survivors' basic needs including safety, emergency housing, and health care. Depending on the experience of survivors, they may be looking for access to more intensive or transitional services, periodic support, or longer-term relationships.

Acute needs are those that exist after the immediate period of crisis. During this period, survivors may begin the process of rebuilding from their experiences. This period of respite can also bring up underlying traumatic feelings and can push survivors back into crisis. However, in this stage of the care continuum, the goal should be to provide a safe place for survivors to rest and begin to contemplate what their next steps are without pressure.

Transitional supports. Once survivors achieve a relative state of stability in terms of their safety and emotional distress, survivors may be ready to seek out treatment for addictions, trauma, and/or mental health. They may also be interested in education, employment, and/or training opportunities. The goals of programs for this period should be transitioning into stable housing and longer-term supports that suit client needs. Survivors may also be looking to reconnect or establish new relationships with family, peers, and community. During this period, survivors can feel triggered or defeated and may need to seek respite from some of the large challenges they have been facing.

Long-term supports support survivors with stability and maintenance. It is important to note that despite the appearance of ongoing stability, survivors may continue to experience triggering events and challenges and will likely continue to benefit from support. Some examples are running into someone from their experience in the sex industry, losing a job, or relapses related to substance use.

BASIC NEEDS

I've attempted to exit the sex trade 4 – 5 times, each time I ended up on the streets, with no food and no support systems in place to help me.

Regardless of where survivors turn to for support once they escape, they will need to have their basic needs met to avoid returning to the traffickers. This may be for survivors exclusively, or may also include their children. The United Nations International Labour Organization defines basic needs as housing (shelter), food and water, and clothing (ILO, 1976). This definition of basic needs has been criticized as being insufficient as it does not account for health care or communication (United Nations, 1948). In regards to sex trafficking, a more concentrated definition of basic needs is required that encompasses these core elements but adds safety to account for the dangerous situations they are fleeing. In this

section, we discuss the basic needs that survivors require when exiting including safety, housing, income or financial support, food, transportation, clothing, and communication, but stress that these are the minimum requirements for survivors and that their service needs are generally more vast. If these basic needs are not met, however, survivors are much more likely to return to traffickers or the sex industry in general. When faced with the prospect of poverty or homelessness, some survivors may return to traffickers or participate in the sex industry or survival sex, in order to make ends meet.

Survival sex is the act of trading sex, or intimate relationships in exchange for housing or basic needs (Watson, 2011).

BASIC NEEDS



Safety



Income



Transportation



Communication



Housing



Clothing



Food

SAFETY

Safety plans have historically been used for people experiencing intimate partner violence, but are critical to working with survivors of sex trafficking. Safety plans identify steps clients can take to minimize or prepare in the event of future danger or violence (YWCA Sudbury, n.d.).

In all eight cities, participants stressed the need for immediate safety and security for survivors after exiting. One participant discusses this:

Really at the end of the day, any service need is to ensure that they feel safe enough... I don't know if that's possible in the whole sense of the word, which is unfortunate, but provide that as much as possible. Safety, safety, safety, safety because they felt so unsafe for so long and so out of control of their own bodies and their own psychological thought processes for the most part that they don't have that option.

Some survivors felt that they had to physically leave particular cities and neighbourhoods in order to feel safe, while others relied on safety planning, and the security that organizations offered. Survivors may have an immense fear of retribution from traffickers, often having previously experienced violence, manipulation, and intimidation. In some instances, immediately when escaping, survivors may be concerned that individuals or groups of people are looking for them. Survivors often seek safe places to go when they exit, either through services and organizations or through their own ingenuity. One survivor describes hiding out in a laundry room to feel safe:

Not feeling like you can be safe somewhere is huge. So when I first left, I slept in my sister's laundry room, because I needed a small space to feel safe.

Leaving is even more challenging without knowing that there is a safe place that survivors can go for emotional support and safety. Survivors may find this support at the psychosocial level, amongst peers or family, at an organization, or through a system player, such as a health care provider or the police. Some organizations address safety concerns by having 24-hour staff, security, and safe houses with unlisted addresses.

HOUSING

One survivor describes the fundamental role that housing plays in facilitating recovery:

Well, there's a roof over your head and food... Just your everyday survival needs... If you don't have safe stable housing, it's very difficult to do anything in your life, because that just keeps you in survival [mode].

Participants spoke about the need for both emergency and long-term housing for survivors. Several survivors spoke about the lack of housing options they faced when attempting to exit. For instance, in many jurisdictions we visited, survivors were denied access to shelters that work with those who have experienced other forms of intimate partner violence, as well as family shelters. In some cases, this was because they were seen as an additional safety risk for the other women. For instance, one survivor speaks of a trafficker finding her at a shelter:

For me, it took two years and several attempts to get away as he kept finding me at the one shelter. He came looking for me and after he left the shelter told me I could no longer stay there as my presence endangered the other women which meant I had to go back to him as I had nowhere else to go.

This occurrence was more frequent in smaller towns and cities with limited resources. In other cases, survivors were denied access to shelters because they were using substances. When emergency shelter is denied to survivors it may push them back towards the exploiters, as mentioned in the aforementioned quote.

Even when survivors were admitted into emergency shelters, they were generally not specific to survivors of sex trafficking, and hence were not able to sufficiently meet their needs. This included a lack of understanding about sex trafficking and having overly restrictive or punitive policies. This can create an unsafe space for those who have already experienced a great deal of trauma and instability. Some participants also discussed challenges related to time limits, which forced them to reconsider their options and challenged relationships between survivors and staff. Some survivors felt that they were made promises about long-term housing that were unattainable or not realistic. One survivor discusses this:

If you can't provide services let me know. Personally, I like to hear, 'you know what, we can find you a bed for a night but that's all we can do.' Because you know what? I've slept in staircases and I've lived in a Mercedes. A bed would have been nice even if it was one night. And (I'm also thinking) what strings are attached to it, you know. . . What do I have to do?

RECRUITING IN SERVICE SYSTEMS

Participants spoke about the dangers that survivors may face in the shelter system. Traffickers, or other third parties, may attempt to groom or recruit individuals in the shelter system to participate in the sex industry because of their perceived vulnerability related to their lack of housing, income and often limited social networks. This underscores the need for organizations to be diligent, pay attention to client dynamics, and develop a positive rapport with service users. One participant speaks about this:

A couple of times we've had traffickers try to get into the shelter, either by sending other females or coming in themselves. Again, it speaks to our relationship, because the other youth would pick up on it before we would. They would come to our office and say hey, you need to check this kid out. That usually doesn't happen—they don't rat on their friends, so when they would come to me and say something like that I know it's serious and we have kind of hashed it out that way.

The fact that trafficking does occur within the shelter system reinforces the importance of safety and making sure that survivors have adequate support. Several survivors spoke about the need to have a dedicated house for survivors of sex trafficking to make residents feel safer, although this does not eliminate the possibility of traffickers attempting to recruit. In a study completed in Toronto, Murphy (2016) found that almost all of the young females within a large emergency shelter had been asked to participate in the sex industry at some point during their stay, either within the shelter or in the surrounding areas.

INCOME

When survivors escape sex trafficking, they will need to find an alternative means of obtaining an income. This means finding an immediate source of income and working with survivors to build their long-term earning potential. Securing both of these types of income is immensely challenging, as the options available to survivors are limited. One immediate option is social assistance; although participants in this study were quick to point out the inadequacy of this form of compensation. This ultimately increases the likelihood that survivors will return to traffickers, the sex industry, or other illegal or quasi-legal activities, as one service provider points out:

It's just not, you know, so what do you do in the meantime, so okay she has to go on ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program] or on Ontario Works [social assistance], but then somebody has to supplement, you know you can't just expect her to live on \$600 a month, it's not going to happen, she's going to be a drug dealer or she's going to go back.

Although not universal, due to the young age that many survivors are recruited, their education and mainstream work experience are limited. This means that the employment opportunities available to them are generally minimum-wage positions. As mentioned previously, this is often a dramatic change to the survivors' lifestyle and can be quite difficult for them. It will generally take time for survivors to obtain the education and develop their skill sets before they can find employment that pays a living wage. One service provider with lived experience speaks about how she tries to have survivors focus on their psychological empowerment to get through this period:

So having the pride, because a lot of times all that stuff has been taken away from you, and you've been controlled, and told what you are. So being able to kind of take your power back, I know that a lot of times if someone's going to leave, and they say to me, what am I going to do? I've been making this much money, and now I'm going to go and work out my problems. And unfortunately, I wish I could say let's get you a big job with lots of money, but we all live in poverty, right?

FOOD SECURITY

For those survivors who grew up in poverty, with abuse, or in the child protective system, food can be associated with trauma. Some traffickers may also control food access by deciding on the type, quantity, and time that food is eaten. This trauma may be perpetuated after exiting, as many survivors continue to struggle to access food. One survivor, for instance, named a series of organizations she has to visit, including soup kitchens and food banks, in order to obtain enough food, and says, "We have to travel to find it, it's not a one-stop shop".

Those living in poverty, particularly those in remote communities, are also faced with challenges related to the quality and cost of food. It is important that food is provided for survivors when they initially exit, even if this means buying groceries, as one participant suggested. In addition, some of the younger survivors may have never gone grocery shopping on their own and may feel uneasy about disclosing their need to learn these basic life skills. One survivor described having to return to the sex industry to "feed her family," as without adequate income supports she was unable to afford food after paying rent.

TRANSPORTATION

Identification—One of the first challenges for survivors throughout the country is replacing identification that was stolen or left behind. Identification including driver's licenses, passports, and health cards are frequently stolen, or held by traffickers throughout their exploitation. Survivors talked about this challenge as it related to receiving services, relocating, and accessing bank accounts.

The issue of transportation came up in several ways in this research. When a survivor must flee a city for safety or to receive services, transportation costs can be quite high. In addition, depending on the city, survivors may need immediate transportation within the city, either in the form of taxi cabs, rides, or access to tokens, tickets, or passes. The cost of transit can prohibit people from accessing services that are outside of walking distance. Many jurisdictions in Canada also lack access to cohesive transit systems. Survivors who use methadone, have jobs, or daily appointments may also see transportation as a barrier to exiting.

Public transit can also be a safety concern for those who are actively involved in the legal system or pressing charges against the trafficker. When travelling on public transit, survivors may come in contact with the trafficker, or other people the trafficker knows. This puts survivors in a difficult situation if they are unable to afford the costly alternative of paying for taxis or Ubers.

Transportation between cities can be difficult if survivors lack identification either because it was stolen by the trafficker or lost when exiting. In Thunder Bay, this concern is amplified because leaving the city requires a flight or a long bus ride,

both of which require identification. Advocates in this city have spent additional time working with the airlines so that survivors can leave immediately. If this does not work, survivors must wait several weeks for identification, which can pose a safety risk, or can make survivors tempted to return to traffickers.

In British Columbia, vulnerability related to transportation was reinforced by the murders that occurred along Highway 16, also referred to as the "Highway of Tears", where over 30 women have gone missing over the 700 km of isolated, rural stretch over a 30-year period (Carrier Sekani Family Services, 2013). As a result of community advocacy and a public inquiry, the Government of British Columbia has funded transportation vehicles to reduce the need for hitchhiking. However, this reality is still experienced by vulnerable people throughout Canada, who experience greater risk because of their inability to access affordable or reliable transportation.

CLOTHING

Exit Bags—In several communities across Canada, backpacks are provided to survivors immediately when they exit. They may contain clothing and toiletries.

Fleeing suddenly, or leaving sex trafficking as the result of a police or service intervention can mean that survivors are left with whatever clothes they were wearing when they fled. One survivor, for instance, spoke about having the opportunity to physically escape while only wearing underwear. Organizations struggle to provide appropriate clothing when needed. Exiting and trigger events can happen at any time of year or any time of the day. In Winnipeg for example, one participant explains the dire situation survivors who exit in the winter face:

We have women that are still standing on that street with no socks, nothing. Are we preventing frostbite? We have people that sleep in between our stairs during the weekend to get out.

Apart from immediate safety needs, clothing also may be connected to the identities of survivors. For instance, survivors may feel safer exiting if they are able to change the way they look. One participant outlines some requests that survivors have for changing the way they look:

Hair dye or haircuts so that they could change their appearance so that they're less fearful of being recognized, [those are basic needs] on top of food, clothing, hygiene.

Service providers spoke about their desire to provide decent clothing and choice to survivors as a way of reinforcing independence and empowerment early on in the service relationship. One participant discusses this in more detail:

One of the main things we have on hand is clothes so that when people first come in they have access to things that are new and nice, not just from Giant Tiger, not the cheapest of the cheap, things that actually show that the people are valuable.

This is also important because traffickers may have controlled outfits and purchased clothing on behalf of survivors. Service providers should, therefore, allow survivors to choose from what is available to them, as much as possible.

COMMUNICATION

Phones and social media can be connected with 'regular clients' and traffickers. For this reason, some survivors dispose of their phones and social media accounts. One participant speaks about knowing how engrained survivors still are in their experience by their willingness to "give up their phone":

A lot of girls come out and they keep regular clients, one or two, just in case, or to make up the extra, (if she has exited) she's got to be willing to give up her phone, and to start new.

One challenge with removing phones and social media accounts is that survivors may lose access to the natural supports they had while they were being exploited. This can create the feeling of having to start over again and perpetuate feelings of loneliness and disconnection as discussed earlier. To this end, one participant suggested providing survivors with disposable phones and phone cards in order to reach out for support.

Social media is also used for advertising in the sex industry. While some survivors may keep social media and their former identities separate, survivors may require support with requesting the removal of accounts operated by the trafficker(s).

OTHER SERVICE NEEDS

In addition to basic needs, survivors may have multiple service needs. This research identified specialized case management, round-the-clock support with no time restrictions, culturally relevant and spiritual care, facilitating community membership, providing support on healthy relationships, outreach, family reconnect and support services, legal support, mental health and substance use treatment, and prevention services. Each is discussed below.

SPECIALIZED CASE MANAGEMENT

Both service providers and survivors frequently spoke about the need for services and supports

that are specifically designed for survivors of sex trafficking. This includes having staff that are trained and knowledgeable about the experience of sex trafficking, the process of recovery, and survivors' multi-faceted needs. Case management may consist of wraparound services such as: acquiring basic needs, housing support or eviction prevention, education, training and employment, coordination of health and mental health services, legal support services and/or advocacy, life skills development, family counselling, and parenting support. Several participants also discussed the importance of recreational supports for survivors. For some, this meant physical activities or exercise, while for others this meant art, music, or other

OTHER SERVICE NEEDS



Support from peers and staff with lived experience



Legal support and advocacy



Mental health, trauma and substance use



Family reconnection



Harm reduction



Specialized case management



Healthy relationships



Employment



Culturally relevant and spiritual care



Healthcare

activities. Recreation was seen as an important way for survivors to make connections with others, reduce stress, and to have fun. One participant describes it in the following way:

But the normalcy in life is—well for people that are healthier in society is—that the more that they are active and have pleasurable pursuits, outside of getting high is to have a fuller life; it helps people feel good about themselves. The more positive experiences people have, the better they feel about themselves and society, and they feel more accomplished.

As mentioned above, in the absence of specialized supports, survivors must utilize other services, such as those geared towards homelessness or domestic violence survivors. While helpful, the staff may not have specialized knowledge of sex trafficking, and programs may place constraints or barriers that do not meet the needs of this population.

ROUND-THE-CLOCK SERVICES WITH NO TIME RESTRICTIONS

Survivors frequently spoke about service restrictions in two ways: the hours of operation and the length of services. It is common for survivors to require services outside of the traditional nine to five hours. This includes when they first flee and once they are in the process of healing. Some survivors expressed feeling particularly triggered or more likely to enter a state of psychological crisis at night, and hence having support during this time can be pivotal. One service provider says:

I would say that someone who is exiting needs 24-hour access to supports and not just 9:00 to 5:00, Monday to Friday. They would need a 24/7 service, meaning that there's somebody

that they can call in the middle of the night if they need to.

In addition, one service provider spoke about “setting up clients for success” by being flexible about what hours they receive services, such as not setting early morning appointments, at least early in their recoveries. When possible, services should not be time-limited, as each survivor’s healing journey will vary in time. Generally, survivors discussed the need to have programs without time or age cut-offs. Recovering from traumatic experiences, mental health and substance use do not necessarily follow linear, predictable patterns. While this may not be possible for many programs due to funding and demand for services, having an “open door” policy, meaning that if survivors ever wish to reach out they may, can be helpful. One service provider calls on others to think about the kind of support they are offering, as making a commitment to see survivors through the process may take several years:

So, do we have the capacity to make that long-term commitment to see people through that entire process, however long that may take, whatever that may look like, whatever obstacles it might be? Do we have that capacity to see it through to the end? Or is it just—okay, we got them away from the person who is exploiting them, there you go.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND SPIRITUAL CARE

Participants throughout the country spoke about the importance of culturally relevant services and/or spiritual care. Spirituality can be helpful in regulating emotions and facilitating a sense of belonging. Some survivors may have experienced spiritual abuse or been separated from their spiritual communities during, or prior to, their

experience with sex trafficking. Some survivors may look to reconnect or establish a connection with traditional teachings, faith-based, and/or spiritual communities. Numerous survivors spoke about how connecting with their Indigenous culture was imperative to their healing processes, including connecting with elders, attending ceremonies, drumming, and smudging. This highlights the importance of communities having Indigenous organizations, and for other agencies to have strong partnerships with Indigenous organizations. One survivor shares how important connecting with her culture was to her recovery:

I was very sick when I had to clean up, really, really sick. Physically, my health was declining and I had to get my health up again so I could start my healing with my emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual—you name it, abuse. I did all kinds... I went to every program, non-Indigenous programs that were offered. And I never thought anything about getting involved with my culture, because I totally lost that... And then one day I said I still feel empty here; there's a space that's not filled in, there's a void there. Well, I'm going to meetings, I'm doing counselling, I do crafts and do all kinds of things, I do my affirmations, I do meditation but I still feel empty. I don't know what it is, it's eating away at me, so you know what? I heard this woman say—I'm an Indigenous woman... So I started thinking about—I am an Indigenous woman and I'm proud to be an Anishinaabe... so then I started opening up to culture, started coming to (an Indigenous organization), and I started going to the Friendship Centre, and I started smudging. It didn't take me overnight to get here, it didn't

take me a month, it was a long journey to find my roots, you know? And I always use the four medicines, the creator gave us the four medicines to feel calm, to feel good, to feel protected, to heal... I always rely on my drum... that's the way I mourn, this is the way I heal. So I rely on my culture to help to get me here where I am, to open up my voice, to find my voice so I can speak for the women who were on the street that I met who are no longer here and that the ones who were abused that couldn't speak because they're not here, I could speak for that.

For other participants, being spiritual meant connecting with organized religion. For instance, one survivor, when asked what helped in her recovery, said:

Faith—my life unravelled before me in a matter of minutes, and I turned to God for help. I started to consider the spiritual aspects of my life as well as the physical, mental, emotional and psychological.

Another survivor spoke about how going to a Buddhist temple helped her “*Find peace with her thoughts*”. Participants asserted the importance, however, of following the survivors’ lead in helping set up these meaningful spiritual connections, without any pressure, real or perceived. One service provider reflects on this:

A couple of years ago I knew a girl who's living with a family, and she comes to me like, they're pressuring me to go to church, and I was like, ah, crap. [I] called up the family, and they were like, we just asked her if she wanted to come to church.

And so, she was living in their house, so it was that perceived obligation. I'm living in their house, they've offered to bring me to church, sure, I feel like I have to say yes. And so I had to explain to the family—I know you just asked a question, it wasn't done in any sort of intentionally pressuring way, but there was this perceived obligation. So our restorations are trying to figure out how to provide for the spiritual needs of people, but in ways that are empowering, and there's no perceived obligation.

It is important to note that spirituality and religion are not necessarily synonymous, and some survivors spoke about finding spiritual connections without religion, including through nature, yoga, and meditation.

COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

Many survivors described finding a sense of community, whether geographically or through membership with a particular group or religion, as being pivotal to their healing. Feeling a sense of belonging and value in their communities was listed as particularly important. One service provider speaks to this need:

And the idea of providing that sense of love and belonging that is not being provided in a toxic way... Like, we might get housing, we might be able to get them on Ontario Works (social assistance), we might be able to get them to the food bank, but if there isn't that sense of, like you have a community of people who care about you and you matter, outside of this work, or outside of this game, whatever, if that sense of belonging and

that sense of community is stronger with the trafficker than it is outside of that community [it will making exiting difficult].

Community membership may happen with the support of service providers or organically for survivors who exit without the support of services. Communities can provide natural supports and fulfill a fundamental psychosocial need. A sense of belonging and connectedness can also help with recovery from traumatic experiences.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

That's something that I'm still struggling with, what the hell is healthy?

Several survivors spoke about not experiencing any healthy relationships in their lives, including when growing up and while being exploited. Many survivors expressed that they do not know what a healthy relationship entails and that many unhealthy dynamics seem normal to them. They expressed a need to learn strategies for developing and maintaining healthy relationships with appropriate boundaries with agency supports, friends, peers, and romantic partners in particular. Some examples provided by survivors included developing relationships where there is no expectation of monetary rewards for sexual acts, feeling okay telling their partners they are not in the mood for sex without feeling guilty, and recognizing when their partners' behaviours are abusive. Some survivors spoke about not being involved in a relationship for some time after exiting the sex industry, and some chose to be completely abstinent during their recoveries. This was by no means universal, however, as some survivors reported that having a loving partner was critical in their recoveries. One survivor describes her struggle to develop healthy sexual relationships:

Positive sexual relationships that don't involve money, or feelings of coercion... it's taken me years to be able to have sex and I have to assess everything I do, to be like, is this part of my routine still? And, it's been years. Or, am I doing this because I really want to? Is this just kind of what I've always been doing? Nobody is out there to teach you how to have sex like a regular human. Especially when like, your sexuality has been built on the exchange of money and forced and basically acting from a very young teenager, up until in my case, my mid-20's.

This has important implications for service providers, who are often key to modelling appropriate boundaries and discussing the survivors' relationships with others. One survivor spoke about how she would like service providers to feel comfortable discussing healthy sexuality and commented that many shy away from the topic out of embarrassment or fear of crossing professional boundaries. This survivor stated that it has been helpful in her recovery to discuss the difference between healthy sexuality and exploitation. This, of course, is a delicate balance as other survivors may be triggered by some discussions about sex. As with all services provided to this population, they must be based on what the individual is comfortable with.

The discussion of healthy relationships also has important implications for prevention work, as survivors are sometimes not aware that they are not in a healthy relationship with the traffickers. One survivor elaborates on this:

I think it goes back to a foundation of I don't think any of us, especially if we didn't grow up with a healthy relationship around us, really know what that is. And it really puts us at risk

of lots of things happening in our lives around entering the sex trade or being exploited. I think you're vulnerable to it because you either weren't educated about it or you didn't see it growing up. I think that's out there in society as a whole that we need to do more around what is it, what are healthy relationships, because most of us don't know.

OUTREACH

Outreach services are important for survivors of sex trafficking. As mentioned previously, many survivors do not identify as being exploited while they are being trafficked and as such may not reach out for support. In addition, many survivors stated that they did not know what services were available when they attempted to exit.

Outreach services should be low-barrier and provide support to those who are currently in the sex industry from a harm reduction perspective. Building rapport and providing services to those who consider their participation in the sex industry to be consensual can reduce risks while allowing for contacts to be developed should clients or their peers find themselves in an exploitative situation. Direct outreach services should seek to meet clients where they are at and focus on building relationships while staying connected with a continuum of services in the sector.

Outreach can also take the form of public education. For instance, some service providers spoke about advertising their services on lipstick cases or cards that can be left in a variety of places such as bars, clubs, and other businesses. Outreach can also take the form of training and educational engagement with people who work in legal, health, or education systems, or in the service industry. This training should teach employees to spot signs of sex trafficking and provide

contacts to report suspicion. Teaching these business owners and service providers about sex trafficking may help reduce the participation for those who are unwillingly or unknowingly supporting traffickers.

FAMILY RECONNECT AND OTHER SUPPORTS

You can be the greatest social worker in the world, but you'll never be as good as someone's family member. Just because they provide that natural support and feel the most comfortable.

Many survivors have become isolated from their families as a result of their trafficking experience. Yet families can provide important natural support for survivors and when safe and appropriate, can be one of the best support structures for overcoming challenges. Some survivors may, therefore, wish to reconnect with their families when exiting. For some, this may simply mean returning home, and for others, wrap-around supports such as family counselling and mediation should be offered. Family support may also include extended family and broader social networks of supportive adults. Structured support programs allow families to develop strategies for supporting survivors through trauma and recovery, as well as attend to their own feelings that arise during the process.

In addition to assisting survivors with strengthening relationships with their families and chosen supports, some agencies also offer support to individuals who have family involved in the sex industry. In Halifax, one participant describes how her agency supports families:

We get calls from a lot of moms, who have daughters in the sex trade at a very young age. I think they need a lot of support. And, maybe they just need support supporting their daughters.

ADVOCATES AND LEGAL SUPPORT

Advocates provide a social service, or social work based supports for young people involved in the legal system. They often assist with emotional and behavioural responses to stress related to the legal system.

As discussed above, survivors may have pending legal cases that they are involved in either as a witness, victim, accused or co-accused. Often these charges were the result of actions of the survivor while being exploited or under duress. As this process is generally lengthy and potentially traumatic, support should be available for young people who are involved with the legal system. Advocates can prepare the survivor for what to expect at court and guide them throughout the process.

MENTAL HEALTH, TRAUMA, AND SUBSTANCE USE

Both survivors and service providers in all eight cities discussed the need for support regarding mental health concerns, trauma and substance use. As mentioned above, some traffickers use substances in the grooming and exploitation processes as a mechanism of control, and some survivors use substances to self-medicate. In both cases, survivors may wish to reduce or eliminate their use of substances when exiting. The substance use services that were mentioned throughout the country were residential treatment, detox, and harm reduction services. One survivor discusses the process of getting support related to substance use:

I feel like that's another journey within the journey of exiting. Like, there's the journey to sobriety, and there's the journey to exiting and the interconnection between the two. And it's not even what came first, sometimes one's supporting the other.

Unfortunately, it was very common to hear that both substance use treatment centres and detox centers were fraught with lengthy waitlists. This is problematic for those who need immediate access to services when attempting to stop using substances. One service provider elaborates on the importance of immediate intervention when survivors are ready to address their substance use:

I've tried to get girls into detox and it's a wait, and you're going to lose them. If somebody says, "I need help, I'm ready" there has to be something available right then and there or they're gone, they're gone and it'll be months before they come back, years before they come back.

In many cases, survivors use substances to self-medicate for the trauma they have experienced and other mental health challenges. For this reason, treating substance use often involves treating mental health concerns concurrently. It is for this reason that harm reduction approaches should be utilized, which includes supporting survivors who wish to continue to use and those who desire abstinence. One survivor speaks about how removing this coping mechanism can cause a flood of emotions:

And you don't want to feel. You take that addiction away, and shit comes up. So much shit comes up. Well, there's a thawing out period

when you start feeling your feelings again. And it all comes at once. It's not just little by little.

Both survivors and service providers across the country spoke about the importance of survivors, when ready, receiving some form of trauma counselling in their recoveries. Various modalities were suggested including Dialogical Behavioural Therapy (DBT), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, and other forms of trauma-focused therapies. Trauma-specific counselling can be an important bridge to support survivors with a range of mental health concerns, and survivors can seek support for working through traumatic experiences, daily challenges, emotional regulation, personal relationships, employment, school and social challenges. Participants stressed the importance of survivors receiving counselling from someone that is knowledgeable about sexual exploitation and can address complex trauma. Interestingly, three participants stated that group therapy can be problematic for survivors of sex trafficking, particularly among those who are in different stages of recovery, as the group members can trigger each other.

Many survivors require long-term, ongoing trauma counselling with someone they trust. However, because public services manage lengthy waitlists and can usually only offer short-term support, and most survivors cannot afford private therapists, accessing this critical counselling is difficult. While in some jurisdictions there is funding available for survivors to receive trauma therapy (such as through Victims Services), this is not always the case, and private trauma-focused therapy can be expensive and require specific practitioners. Whenever possible, agencies working with survivors should have mental health supports built into programming or additional partnerships that make access for survivors a priority.

PREVENTION AND EDUCATION

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, what was there for me? There were definite risk factors at the onset of that [the exploitation] happening and as I became an adolescent there could have been more to prevent what happened to me, but there was nothing. There was nothing to identify that because of what happened I was going to exhibit certain behaviours; I was going to seek out certain things. And there was nothing there for my mom or anybody around us to be able to indicate that I was going to be at risk... there was nobody around me to say what he was doing was exploitive... what was there in my community to prevent this?

Canada is still largely reactive to the problem of sex trafficking and exploitation, and many participants discussed the need for a more proactive response towards prevention. The prevention efforts discussed in this research included public awareness of the issue and education in schools.

Providing education in schools that reflects the needs of young people is a potential way to mitigate vulnerability. Participants across the country spoke about the importance of having modern and updated curriculum on healthy relationships, consent, sexuality, the sex industry, pornography, and exploitation. Having early and open conversations about these topics may not prevent all instances of human trafficking, but they may provide context and reduce stigma for those young people who are facing violence or exploitation. One survivor speaks about the challenge of not having adequate sexual education in the school system:

Nothing about sex is even taught, you know? Like by 14 or 15 the damage is already done and my stepping stools to who I was going to turn into was already done at that point, you know?

Providing young people with a venue to learn about healthy sexuality, sexual abuse, and exploitation can make it easier for them to understand and describe what is happening, should they ever find themselves in a risky situation. One participant added that education should also focus on young men, and their roles in healthy relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We are recommending the following changes to the systemic barriers affecting a survivor's successful exit from sex trafficking:

- **Additional funding to support the service needs of victims:** While the social services sector is often critical to providing support to victims as they attempt to exit, the lack of coordination between services and ongoing funding concerns pose tremendous barriers. Coordination among service providers is important as victims often have multiple needs and will require help from agencies possessing specific expertise. In an effort to further break down barriers, integration and collaboration is required between the police, health care and housing providers, mental health agencies and agencies supporting individuals with their substance use, among others.
- **Creating specialized police training and supports:** Survivors reported that their experiences with the police tended to be better when there was a unit dedicated specifically to human trafficking and/or officers who were trained specifically on this issue.
- **Eliminating bias and discrimination in the health care system and increasing responsiveness through training:** Survivors often have urgent health needs when exiting and while in the sex industry. The response of health care professionals can have an impact on victims by influencing the quality of the treatment they receive, their trust of the health care system and where they seek out help in the future. It is important that health organizations

work towards eliminating bias related to the sex industry and substance use that can lead to a feeling of shame for victims in their care.

In addition, health care professionals may lack training on the warning signs of sex trafficking, and this can be a missed opportunity for intervention and potential support.

- **Changes to the legal system:** We have identified a need for more specialized Crown attorneys and judges presiding over sex trafficking cases. These specialized members take into consideration how trauma bonds impact a sex trafficking case and how PTSD affects the brain, memory and behaviour. We are also hopeful that courts will address the need for specialized supports for survivors giving testimony (i.e. through testifying aids including therapy dogs and CCTV) to avoid further traumatization of survivors.
- **Child welfare reform:** Some survivors fear child apprehension if they either disclose that they have been involved in the sex industry, or for the lack of resources they have upon exiting (such as housing, money and food). Second, youth living in care or aging out of care are particularly vulnerable to being exploited. The child welfare system needs to be reviewed through the lens of how we can better support this vulnerable population in order to prevent their heightened risk of being lured into sex trafficking and remaining entrenched in the sex industry.

- **Prevention and education efforts:** Participants across the country spoke about the importance of having a modern and updated curriculum on healthy relationships, consent, sexuality, the sex industry and exploitation. Having early and open conversations about these topics may not prevent all instances of sex trafficking, but this dialogue can make it easier for victims to understand and describe what is happening, should they ever find themselves in a risky situation.
- **Increased public awareness:** When they do reach out for support, survivors often experience stigma and discrimination with service providers and their community holding the belief that the victims are responsible for their trafficking experiences. More awareness is needed for the public to understand the signs of coercion, violence and exploitation.

CONCLUSION — A CAUTIOUS MESSAGE OF HOPE

In this report we have shared the findings of a national study on the process of exiting and escaping sexual exploitation and trafficking. We described the numerous barriers that survivors face, as well as the psychosocial and psychological factors that might pose additional challenges to survivors. These are important considerations for anyone trying to understand this process, provide services to survivors, or design policies to address this issue. We outlined the basic and service needs of survivors embarking on this process, as well as important theoretical models of practice for working with this population. While this research rightfully depicts the process of exiting as arduous, complex, and filled with challenges, it also shows that there are dedicated people across the country who are willing to work tirelessly to support survivors through this process. One service provider emphasises this latter point:

Because what we're constantly hearing at our table is you know about barriers and funding, blah-blah-blah, but I think we still need to honour and celebrate, because every one of us that are here today do things really, really, well and I think we need to capture that too.

Understanding and naming the barriers and struggles survivors face is an important step towards ensuring that adequate programming is in place and that policy makers know where there are systemic gaps that need to be addressed.

Perhaps most importantly, this research demonstrates the tremendous resilience that survivors across the country possess, and the amazing ways that the human spirit can persist after unspeakable hardship and tragedy. While the process of escaping sex trafficking can indeed be a process of recovery that can last a lifetime, the survivors in this study show that there is hope for anyone who is being exploited or trafficked and that there is indeed light at the end of the dark tunnel. One survivor who escaped her exploitative situation ten years ago and has moved on to working with others in this process provides this message to survivors:

There's always hope... Like the things that you're feeling right now, will not necessarily be the things you feel in 5 years... Well now I'm 10 years out of the life and this how I'm doing... I'm in a healthy relationship with someone, and there is hope that things get better. Even if there are triggers, and healing is ongoing, there is hope.

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The Original ‘Scorecard’ — The Hindsight Group

In November 2012, representatives from over 20 agencies and organizations as well as individuals with lived experience gathered for a community consultation in Calgary, Alberta. The objective was to understand and discuss the process of exiting sex trafficking, and to create a shared, collective tool to assist survivors and those working with them. Through a combination of large group discussions and smaller focus groups, a preliminary tool (the ‘scorecard’) was created by Dr. Susan McIntyre, which outlined 27 factors that facilitate the exiting process for survivors. The Hindsight Group later partnered with Covenant House Toronto to continue this work nationally. After the partnership was formed, the 27 elements were grouped into four categories: basic needs, service needs, psychological factors, and philosophical considerations. Instead of creating an additional ‘scorecard’, researchers decided to create a framework focused on the multiple needs and barriers of survivors. This current research sought to elaborate on this work by visiting multiple cities across Canada. The research sought to answer the following questions:

- 1 What is the process of exiting sex trafficking? What are the major barriers to escaping sex trafficking?
- 2 What basic, instrumental, and psychological needs do survivors have when exiting sex trafficking? At what point in the journey are certain needs more pressing?

- 3 Which parts of the ‘Scorecard’ created by Dr. McIntyre are still pertinent to the exiting process? Which elements should be added or updated? What are the regional variations for each of the cities in this study?

Methodology

Community events were hosted in seven Canadian cities, including Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Halifax, Niagara Region, Thunder Bay, and St. John’s to review and update the original ‘scorecard’. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and the inability to find a date that enough stakeholders could attend, individual interviews were held in either English or French for stakeholders in Montreal. These cities were selected to obtain wide geographic representation across Canada in areas that are known to be ‘hotspots’ for sex trafficking, and include border towns, tourist attractions, urban and remote communities.

A total of 201 individuals participated in the national consultations and interviews. This included 155 stakeholders that work directly with survivors, including service providers, health care professionals and the police and 50 persons with lived experience (47 females and 3 males). Both groups of participants were sent a survey to complete prior to the event, with questions pertaining to the needs of survivors and barriers they face to exiting. Service providers were asked about the work their agency does, and survivors were asked both helped them when exiting, and what did not. These findings were collated and served as an initial discussion point at the community consultations. The findings from these surveys were also included in the analysis for the final report.

Two to four facilitators guided each event. Participants sat in small groups and discussed the following questions:

- 1 Why don't those in situations of trafficking/exploitation "just leave?" What are the barriers to leaving?
- 2 Exiting has been described as a process/journey—is this true? What does this process look like? Why does it sometimes take more than one attempt to leave? Do the needs of survivors vary based on where they are at in their process/journey?
- 3 What do survivors need to leave? Here are some categories to think about: Basic needs, service needs (what kind? promising practices?), psychological needs, support needs (e.g. family, friends, community), spiritual/cultural needs, other

The small groups then reported back to the larger group and more discussion was had. Participants with lived experience received a stipend for their participation. Table discussions were recorded and transcribed. No identifying information was gathered other than which organizations participants were representing. Transcriptions were analyzed thematically using Nvivo software.



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