LOCAL SAFETY AUDIT REPORT:

TOWARDS THE PREVENTION OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND RELATED EXPLOITATION IN THE OTTAWA AREA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project imPACT
July 2014
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In March 2013, Status of Women Canada (SWC) approved $200,000 in funding to PACT-Ottawa, for a project aimed at building partnerships and collaboration between community stakeholders for the purpose of identifying and responding to the specific needs of victims of sex trafficking in the Ottawa area.

The project, titled imPACT, is one of only three studies of its kind in the country, piloting the Local Safety Audit Guide (LSAG) to Prevent Trafficking in Persons and Related Exploitation developed by the Department of Public Safety Canada (PSC).

The guide was developed by PSC as a tool to assess the nature and scope of trafficking and to develop an action plan tailored specifically to local context.

The research was undertaken between June 2013 and April 2014 with a broad range of key partners and community stakeholders. Project imPACT key partners include: Crime Prevention Ottawa, Ottawa Police Service and St. Joe’s Women’s Centre, who together constitute the project’s Steering Committee (SC). Consultations were held with key partners to identify gaps in services, policies, strategies and programs for women at-risk of or who have been trafficked. Efforts were made to work with community stakeholders who experienced human trafficking, had experience working with victims or who were currently encountering trafficking victims. The research team is honouring the request from these stakeholders to maintain their anonymity in this report.

Due to the complexity and the polarizing nature of the topic human trafficking for sexual exploitation, researchers found it difficult at times to work outside the political context and remain impartial. In light of this process, researchers tried to address this challenge through rigorous research. Data was collected through stakeholder roundtables, in-depth interviews, focus groups and online surveys using discourse analysis, constant comparative method and qualitative coding. Despite discourse analysis, it is important to understand the human experience and the context within which this research lies. As such the data collected is set within a critical analysis of the current gaps and services in Ottawa with the focus of collecting information to shed light on the complex issue and to act on it.

The majority of stakeholders already worked with a definition that was consistent with the UN Protocol on Trafficking or Trafficking in Persons (sections 279.01-279.04) of the Criminal Code of Canada. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of not conflating the term human trafficking with sex work since using the terms interchangeably confuses the issue significantly, diverting funds and energy away from where it is needed.

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2 See section 1.6. methodology.
4 Criminal Code of Canada PART VIII Offences Against the Person and Reputation, Sections 270.01-279.04 http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/page-195.html#h-84
While conducting this research and working with the general public, youth, community stakeholders and senior government officials, we discovered they held the belief that human trafficking victims for sexual exploitation in Ottawa and Canada came largely from Asia or Eastern Europe. This was mainly because they erroneously believed that an international border must be crossed in each case of trafficking.5

Contrary to popular belief, research found that human trafficking is happening in Ottawa and victims are not predominantly from Eastern Europe or Asia5.

Human trafficking is undoubtedly happening in Ottawa. One hundred forty victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation were discovered while conducting this research; according to survivors and a former trafficker, making on average $1000 a night per victim.6 Through interviews with key informants who were supporting human trafficking victims, researchers learned that 90% of victims are Canadians and from the local area.

Through interviews with key informants who were supporting human trafficking victims, researchers learned that 90% of victims identified are Canadians and from the local area. While this research found that the majority of victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Ottawa were youth (12-25 years of age) from all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, the research found that there was increased vulnerability to women and girls due to the convergence of other circumstances. As a result, while youth from all backgrounds were generally at risk of being trafficked, women/girls marginalized by intersectionality of race, class, disabilities, gender ideology and/or sexual orientation were at higher risk of being trafficked. Hence women and girls who are already marginalized for varied reasons are likely socially ostracized and therefore their risk for being trafficked is greater.

Particularly noteworthy among the findings is the age of many trafficking victims, on average ranging from 12 to 25, with 16 year olds being most vulnerable to recruitment tactics. Also noteworthy was the fact that youth, being the most vulnerable group, were hidden from the commercial sex industry because of their age, and usually trafficked within homes or at private parties. Again, these findings from this research challenge the public perception that exploitation takes place in brothels run by foreign gangs controlling foreign women. Without denying the possibility that the foregoing situation occurs, this research clearly shows that trafficking for sexual exploitation is a domestic problem and is happening to Canadian girls/women in our local contexts.

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6 See section 1.6. methodology on how we collected this data.
Human trafficking has been called modern day slavery, referring to the historic practice of owning individuals for labour exploitation. However, the research did not encounter many stories where victims were tied up or held in captivity against their will. Instead, the research found that girls and women were groomed over many months and restrained by more subtle psychological control mechanisms, giving the false impression to service providers and frontline staff that some victims are complicit and consent to the exploitive process. This strategic manipulation by traffickers made it difficult at times to identify victims.

As stated above, the research suggests that most victims are not in the public commercial sex industry but rather in informal, private settings where they are more difficult to reach. This is particularly the case for underage girls that need to be hidden from the general public, police or service providers. In addition, respondents acknowledged the positive police work being done. However they stated that approaching sex workers with a focus on enforcement (rather than outreach) can endanger potential victims or sex workers by pushing them into more underground and dangerous work. Moreover, our research indicated that police enforcement approaches can fuel tensions between sex workers and police, leading to missed opportunities for collaboration and identification of larger numbers of trafficked youth.

Stakeholders agreed on the immediate and long-term needs of trafficked persons, emphasizing that most of these needs currently are not being met. When support was provided, most of the services were ad-hoc community based actions, with little structured and continuous support. Community stakeholders were concerned that needs for housing, social support and safety services after the initial 72 hours are currently not sufficiently being met; and that should further victims be identified through Project imPACT, trafficked persons may be re-victimized. The most common barriers to supporting victims included lack of funding and resources for specific human trafficking services, the stigma around sexually trafficked persons and sex work, the lack of knowledge regarding human trafficking among both frontline workers and members of the general public, and the psychological manipulation and feelings of affection or fear among victims instilled by their traffickers. Stakeholders also felt that minimal and inaccurate information on human trafficking was available in Ottawa, causing a significant barrier to receiving support from the city, the province or the federal government. Respondents noted the conditions for trafficking are created by often intersecting socio-structural factors, including poverty, sexism/gender stereotyping, racism, homophobia and oppression.
The Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking was developed by St. Joe’s Women’s Centre and PACT-Ottawa, to collaborate in providing direct services and support to victims of human trafficking in Ottawa. See: http://www.ottawacoalition.ca/

The overall aim of this report, built around an analysis of interviews with key informants, is to address the needs mentioned above, as well as highlight the hidden nature of sex trafficking in Ottawa and to provide recommendations moving forward. This report also underlines that larger social problems, in which the problem of human trafficking is embedded, also require addressing. This research thereby underscores the importance of addressing the interconnected issues of poverty, gender inequality, racism, homophobia, hypersexualization of women and girls, and the stigma around sex work, in order to eliminate sexual trafficking in the future.

Based upon the findings in the report, PACT-Ottawa will devise a plan consisting of four main actions:

1. Public Awareness: provide both general awareness and targeted education on the definition and issue of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

2. Training: continue to collaborate with the Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking (Coalition) by providing training on human trafficking to frontline staff such as health care professionals, social workers, police officers and other community service organizations.

3. Educate and Empower: educate youth by promoting gender equality through existing laws and programs that reduce violence against women and that promote positive gender identities and inclusive interactions between genders.

4. Outreach and Partnership: continue to build on community relations established through Project imPACT in order to provide support and information to more at-risk women and victims.

With this in mind, human trafficking is an issue that appears to exist in part, because of systemic failures and misunderstanding.

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