

Fight against human trafficking to get federal government funding



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Metro Ottawa



Rona Ambrose, Minister for Status of Women, announces new government funding to help end cyberbullying and abuse among young people next to a group of students from Lisgar Collegiate Institute on Tuesday April 30, 2013. Photo courtesy of SWC Canada

The federal government is expected to inject some of its money into an Ottawa-based advocacy group which will study the scope of human trafficking of young girls and women and how to prevent sexual exploitation.

Rona Ambrose, Minister of the Status of Women Canada, will make a funding announcement Monday at City Hall alongside Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in Humans (PACT) Ottawa and its partners. The volunteer-run organization has been around since 2004 and works closely with the Ottawa Police Service to prevent the trafficking of young girls and women.

Christina Harrison Baird, PACT Ottawa's director of the Impact project, which is expected to receive the government funding, said there has been an increased number of victims her partner organizations have identified since 2004.

"Most people in Ottawa would not say, 'Oh my God, that's the most pressing problem that we need to address.' And I think partly that's because awareness is still not perhaps what it should be," said Harrison Baird.

She said most victims are female under the age of 25 and some can be as young as 13.

The results from PACT Ottawa's study will form a community action plan that will be developed in the second year of the funding agreement, she added.

"The federal government, I think, deserves some credit for recognizing these types of problems are solved at the local level, but they also have a role because it's a criminal and human rights issue," said Harrison Baird.

Recently in Ottawa, girls between the ages of 15 and 17 made their first court appearances in April [to face allegations of forcing other girls as young as 13 into prostitution](http://metronews.ca/news/ottawa/643611/teen-says-she-was-too-afraid-to-flee-accused-teen-pimps/) (<http://metronews.ca/news/ottawa/643611/teen-says-she-was-too-afraid-to-flee-accused-teen-pimps/>). Their trial has been adjourned until September.

"I think there is a real concern," said Insp. Uday Jaswal with the Ottawa police, who will speak at Monday's announcement. "I think one of the challenges in terms of defining the scope and magnitude of the problem is we don't have a lot of great information. So for one thing it's an underreported crime. Victims don't often appreciate the circumstances that they're in themselves or that there's some real and perceived barriers to reporting not only to police but to support agencies that might assist them."

Jaswal said some women choose not to report instances of human trafficking because of psychological conditioning or because they fear admitting to criminal offences themselves as a result of being involved in sex trade.



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