

# Human trafficking numbers adding up in the capital

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## Ottawa Police have issued a Canada-wide warrant for Jamie Byron.

There are more than 100 victims of human trafficking now getting help in Ottawa, according to a study that tracked them through police and front-line services like shelters and youth organizations.

The girls and women -- most 13 to 25 -- were often lured by men posing as boyfriends, by other females pretending to be pals or the promise of coveted luxuries.

They were trapped with a complex web of mind games, threats and violence.

Then they were put to work behind closed doors, advertised through word-of-mouth or online and made an average of \$500 a day, often seven days a week, for their traffickers.

"The girls that are not getting help -- we don't have any access to them," said Elise Wohlbold of Project imPACT, who stressed that the study was looking for victims of human trafficking not sex trade workers.

"There are other girls out there. It's hard to access them. The pimps are not going to let us in. (The victims) are scared for their life."

Nine in 10 of the victims are Canadian and there is no common denominator like poverty or addiction, according to the study conducted by PACT- Ottawa, which stands for Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in Humans, and funded by Status of Women Canada.

"They come from all backgrounds," Wohlbold said.

"The biggest thing to come out of this is these are Canadian girls and this is a Canadian problem."

A final report on the study's findings is due in May.

Ottawa doesn't yet have a dedicated police unit handling human trafficking, a shelter for victims or specialized support beyond what's offered by volunteers, Wohlbold said.

Also needed is public awareness, education in high schools to alert teens and training so caregivers can spot victims.

City police do have specially-trained district detectives working almost full-time on the complex cases, which require building trust with fearful victims, teaming up with agencies offering long-term help and working with sexual assault, domestic violence and guns and gangs units, Insp. Paul Johnston said.

The force is considering creating a dedicated unit and looking at examples, including Montreal and York, Johnston said.

Meanwhile, detectives are focussed on finding victims, for example by trolling online ads and checking suspicious locales.

Johnston found imPACT's tally of victims surprising and concerning.

"Those are the ones asking for help now - it doesn't include the ones we haven't found," Johnston said. "These are our kids; this is our issue in town. They're out there.

"We need to find a way to help them find a way out."

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