

SEX TRAFFICKING: THE DARK SIDE OF CANADA

When we think about Canada, we think about an almost ideal country, a role model for all the other states to follow. Indeed, Canada ranks very well in different global rankings. According to *The Economist*, Canada is a full democracy and in 2020 was classified as the fifth country in the Global Democracy Index¹. Nowadays (2021) it is standing in the ninth place globally in the Index of Economic Freedom but ranks first if compared only to the other 32 countries on the American continent². Moreover, a recent study made by the U.S. News & World Report together with BAV Group, VMLY&R and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania classifies the country as the best country where to live worldwide in 2021³. This Report analyses different metrics and Canada excels in each of them. Yet behind this idyllic appearance it hides a very dark side: domestic sex trafficking.

According to **article 3** of the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children* adopted by the

¹ The Economist Intelligence Unit. 2021. *Democracy Index 2020 - Economist Intelligence Unit*.

² Heritage.org. 2021. *Canada Economy: Population, GDP, Inflation, Business, Trade, FDI, Corruption*.

UN's General Assembly, human trafficking includes the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation"⁴. Basically, human trafficking occurs every time a person becomes a commodity. Moreover, this kind of exploitation may be manifested in a variety of forms such as sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude or the removal of organs. It is also important to highlight that human trafficking can happen within the boundaries of a specific country (domestic human trafficking) or can be a cross border phenomenon (international human trafficking).

The United Nations Protocol on Trafficking in Persons states that this crime always involves an ACTION (*recruitment, transportation, receipt,*

³ U.S. News & World Report. 2021. *Overall Best Countries Ranking - 2021*.

⁴ Office of the high commissioner of human rights - UN. 2003. *OHCHR | Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*.



Photo taken by Matthew S. Browning

harbouring), some MEANS (coercion, manipulation, abuse of power, threat, fraud) and a PURPOSE (sexual exploitation, force labour, slavery, removal of organs). Hence if one condition in each of these three categories is met, the result is that the person is being trafficked. Canada prohibits all four forms of human trafficking in **Section 279.01** (Trafficking in persons) and **279.011** (Trafficking of a person under the age of eighteen years) of the *Criminal Code*⁵. However, this is a relatively new legislation since before 2005 human trafficking was not included as an offence in the Canadian Criminal Code. In addition to this, international human trafficking is specifically prohibited by **Section 118** of Canada's *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*⁶.

⁵ Laws-lois.justice.gc.ca. 1985. *Criminal Code - Canada*.

⁶ Laws.justice.gc.ca. 2001. *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*

⁷ Ibrahim, D., 2021. *Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2019*. [online] Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics

According to *Statistics Canada*, which is an agency of the Government of Canada, the prevalent form of human trafficking present in the country is sex trafficking. Furthermore, it is mainly domestic sex trafficking since 93% of Canada's human trafficking victims come from within the state⁷. This national statistical office has analysed the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's reports and found out that 97% of sex trafficking victims in Canada are women and girls. A scarier information is that 3/4 of these victims are under the age of 25: 28% of victims are girls under the age of 18 whilst 45% are young women of 18-24 years old⁸. Moreover, the most common recruitment age for girls in Canada is 13 years old⁹. Finally, always according to the analyses of Statistics Canada, in 2019, the police had reported 511 human trafficking incidents, which represents a rate of 1.4 incidents per 100,000 people¹⁰. In contrast to all of this, since 2009, 81%

⁸ Ibid. note 7

⁹ Youtube.com. 2021. *People For Sale: Human Trafficking in Canada | Jocelyn Davison | TEDxUALberta*.

¹⁰ Ibrahim, D., 2021. *Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2019*. [online] Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics.

of persons accused of having committed human trafficking have been men¹¹.

Sex trafficking is actually a very profitable business since a pimp (trafficker) gains on average 280.000 Canadian dollars per year from each female trafficked. Indeed, as *Jocelyn Davison* affirms in her TED conference, “humans are a reusable resource” meaning that traffickers can exploit them more than once thus profiting from the same person over a large amount of time¹². She also states that it has been calculated that on average these women are expected to perform 25 services per day¹³. Nevertheless, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the life expectancy of sex trade victims is very low because women do not survive more than 7 or 10 years living this life¹⁴. Consequently, victims are actually children whose childhood and life are stolen, kids with no future ahead. In fact, escaping from these trafficking network is extremely hard. This is so for three main reasons: fear of the traffickers, fear of the unknown and the trauma bond. Indeed, Karly Church, a young survivor of sex trafficking in Canada who now collaborates with the police to help other women to exit from these networks, explains what these fears consist of¹⁵. Victims are fearful that if they leave, they themselves or their beloved people (if they are still in contact with any of them) might have repercussions. In fact, there is a great chance that the pimps would probably find them and kill them. Then, the other fear is a complex one because it is directly link to the fact that these women usually have a “better” life being trafficked that being not. This is so because many of them are kids who have ran away from home at a very early age or girls without studies and who have no other

work experience. Indeed, if they leave, how will they cover their basic needs? Where they are going to go? Where are they going to sleep? How they are going to survive? Finally, the trauma bond is the reason why the majority of these women do not manage to leave this life. Every time there is sex trafficking, there is a psychological manipulation too. Traffickers do not chose their victims randomly, they employ a method. They are like predators hunting for their prey. Karly explains in her testimony that the trafficker had found her when she was completely hopeless and just waiting to die. Indeed, they search for very vulnerable people being so due to their age, lifestyle, economic situation, drug addiction among many other reasons. Then they start to boost the self-esteem of these people and follow a very specific process in order to trap them in the trafficking network.

The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline explains in its website how is the process through which human trafficking occurs. They have identified 5 phases: *luring*, *grooming*, *isolation*, *manipulation* and *coercion* and, finally, *exploitation*¹⁶. In the first phase the trafficker establishes a connection with the victim in order to develop a relationship. Karly affirms that in this phase the trafficker “asked me a million questions and not once did it feel like I was being interviewed and not once did it feel like I was interrogated, it felt incredibly incredibly special”. She further explains how the pimp will seem to be sincerely caring and how he wants to know about your struggles, your desires, your hopes, your family, your friends, everything. This is so because what they are actually doing is gathering information that they will use afterwards to manipulate the victims. Then the grooming phase

¹¹ Ibid. note 10

¹² Ibid. note 9

¹³ Ibid. note 9

¹⁴ Canada.ca. 2021. *Human Trafficking - Canada.ca*.

¹⁵ Youtube.com. 2021. *Karly's Story | Karly Church | Chatham-Kent Victim Services*.

¹⁶ Canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca. 2021. *How It Happens – The Canadian Centre To End Human Trafficking*.

will start and the trafficker will cover all the basic needs of the girl or woman, he will promise her a great life together, treat her as family, protect her while continuing to boost her self esteem through compliments. Yet this phase is also known as the honeymoon due to the fact that the trafficker will accomplish every desire of the victim, he will give her all she ever wanted or needed, he will shower her with gifts. Rescued girls usually say that in this phase they feel like that is the best their life will ever be. Karly underlines that the only red flag at this point is that “it is too good to be true”, but “who would want to believe that this is too good to be true? If nobody has ever treated you that way before” she adds. However, all that glitter ain’t gold and the situation will rapidly change. In the third phase, called isolation, the trafficker will create distance between their victim and her beloved ones. Some survivors confess they believed there was nobody else who cared about them apart from their trafficker. Indeed, some pimps even delete text messages from the girls’ phone so that they will believe no one is reaching them out. This phase is essential to ensure a strong bond with the victim, so that the only person she will turn to will be the trafficker. Then the darkest phase beings: coercion and manipulation. In this phase the trafficker will start to do the so called “conditioning”. This consists of associating two different factors and, in this case, traffickers make victims associate sex with gifts, sex with a reward, sex with money. Karly explains that it is a very confusing phase, because the pimp “was giving me all that love and attention and then he just pulled it all away...you ask yourself what you have done wrong because you know he can treat you as no one has ever done before”. In fact, the trafficker will start sending mixed messages and claiming to the victim that they owned them money. It is confusing because at the beginning (in the honeymoon phase) they shower girls with gifts, buy them expensive clothes or makeup, bring them to fancy hotels or restaurants

but they will never mention they expect something in exchange for all of that. So girls feel then indebted but they have no means to repay everything back and this is when the trafficker will introduce the idea to work in the sex trade. This idea can be offered or imposed to the victim. Indeed, some pimps uses direct methods such as “you must do it because you own me money” or, in extreme cases, “you must do it or I will kill you” whilst others use a subtler and indirect way “if you do this, then we will have enough money to have the life you have always wanted” or “if you do this, I will still love you”. Moreover, some pimps give options such as enter in the sex trade, work like an escort or dance. No matter which technique the trafficker has used, the majority of survivors confesses they felt like they have chosen it. Probably because they would do whatever it takes to get back to the honey moon phase. Yet soon enough all victims will notice that they have no control over the situation they are living. In fact, the trafficker choses the services the girls will provide, the money they will charge for it, the people they will sleep with, the photos they will take for the adds and so on. Consequently, the last phase of the process will commence and the trafficker will exploit the victim by ensuring she will not leave and by taking away all her earnings.

This process is so complex yet all rescued girls and woman assert they have lived it. In some cases it last longer than others, but the different phases are always present. Moreover, the process involves such a manipulation that actually these women are brainwashed and this is the main reason why it is so hard to exit from this. First of all, women are convinced they are indebted, they are convinced they have freely chosen to enter in the sex trade (actually in some cases they do not even know they are victims) and they are constantly told by their traffickers that they are breaking the law meaning that they risk to go to prison if police catch them. Nevertheless, exiting from this network is not

impossible and Karly, together with other girls, are a proof of this.

In Canada the police organize many rescue operations to find minors who have been trapped in these networks and also to inform young women that they are not criminals but victims who can be helped by them. Moreover, there are many organizations that give supports to victims of sex trafficking such as *Act Alberta*, ***Battered Women Support Services Vancouver***, ***Children of the Street Society***, ***Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation***, ***London Anti-Human Trafficking Committee***, ***Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network (TCHTN)*** along with many others.

To conclude, sex trafficking is an issue in Canada as in the rest of the world and needs to be urgently addressed by governments and the society as a whole. It is not acceptable that in 2021 there is still slavery, any kind of slavery. Besides freedom is the first right mention in article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948¹⁷ which has been signed by 48 countries around the world, including Canada. As Emily Pelly, a researcher in child trafficking in Canada, has stated during her performance at the Tedx Talks: “we need to believe that when we defend the freedom of others, we are defending the freedom of ourselves”¹⁸.

Beatrice Carpani,

Fuente de Vida Team.

¹⁷ Nations, U., 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* | *United Nations*.

¹⁸ Youtube.com. 2017. *True North and Child Trafficking in Canada* | *Emily Pelly* | *TEDxDalhousieU*.

References:

- ACT Alberta. 2021. *ABOUT TRAFFICKING - ACT Alberta*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.actalberta.org/about-trafficking/>>
 - Canada.ca. 2021. *Human Trafficking - Canada.ca*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/human-trafficking.html>>
 - Canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca. 2021. *How It Happens – The Canadian Centre To End Human Trafficking*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/how-it-happens/>>
 - Heritage.org. 2021. *Canada Economy: Population, GDP, Inflation, Business, Trade, FDI, Corruption*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.heritage.org/index/country/canada>>
 - Ibrahim, D., 2021. *Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2019*. [online] Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics. Available at: <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-005-x/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm>>
 - Laws-lois.justice.gc.ca. 1985. *Criminal Code - Canada*. [online] Available at: <<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/pdf/c-46.pdf>>
 - Nations, U., 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations*. [online] United Nations. Available at: <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>>
 - Office of the high commissioner of human rights - UN. 2003. *OHCHR | Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/protocoltraffickinginpersons.aspx>>
 - The Economist Intelligence Unit. 2021. *Democracy Index 2020 - Economist Intelligence Unit*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/>>
 - United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime. 2021. *Karly Church*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/Karly-Church.html>>
 - U.S. News & World Report. 2021. *Overall Best Countries Ranking - 2021*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/overall-rankings>>
 - Youtube.com. 2021. *Karly's Story | Karly Church | Chatham-Kent Victim Services*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZBg739HkJQ>>
-

- Youtube.com. 2021. *People For Sale: Human Trafficking in Canada* | Jocelyn Davison | TEDxUAlberta. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbLK_6qlajl>
- Youtube.com. 2017. *True North and Child Trafficking in Canada* | Emily Pelly | TEDxDalhousieU. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_7yvJfJR4s>

Published by:



**Asociación para las
Naciones Unidas
en España**
United Nations Association of Spain

Vía Laietana, 51, entlo.3ª. 08003 Barcelona
Tels.: 93 301 39 90 – (31 98) Fax: 93 317 57 68
e-mail: info@anue.org

With the support of:



Generalitat de Catalunya
**Institut Català
de les Dones**