

Executive Summary

A Coordinated Response to Assess Human Trafficking in Terms of the Problem, Prevention, and Empowerment

A Collaborative Project between Lambton College and the Sexual Assault
Survivors' Centre Sarnia-Lambton

August 2020



"Held by Love."

Acrylic on Canvas

20 x 24"

2014

Carla Raes Sarantopoulos

Hearing a story of personal loss, the gateway to the bondage of addictions, believing shameful thoughts about self, isolating from authentic connections. I was moved. But it didn't end there. The story shifted from darkness to being chased down and restored by the power of LOVE. A few days later, I heard a similar journey. Of powerlessness in the face of darkness. At first all efforts to seek help were futile. Then LOVE intervened. LOVE is the power to break every chain. LOVE holds us in our darkness until we find peace. LOVE doesn't let go until we are free and whole. This painting is my response.

– Carla Raes Sarantopoulos

A Coordinated Response to Assess Human Trafficking in Terms of the Problem, Prevention and Empowerment

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We are grateful to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada for funding this We are grateful to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada for funding this project. We are appreciative of the support we received from our partner, Sexual Assault Survivors' Centre Sarnia-Lambton, who shared with us their insight and wisdom and supported our work. We are thankful to our many Community Service Providers and Indigenous community members from Sarnia-Lambton, Aamjiwnaang First Nation Chippewas of Sarnia, Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and Walpole Island-Bkejwanong Territory. We appreciate your willingness to participate in this research sharing your knowledge and experience. Thank you to the many College students who also contributed to the research by attending the awareness sessions and providing insight to this research. Most importantly, we are very grateful and honour the women in this study, for your strength, resilience and courage to have shared your personal stories and truths.

INTRODUCTION

This research report, *A Coordinated Response to Assess Human Trafficking in Terms of the Problem, Prevention and Empowerment*, was funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) from 2018-2020. Lambton College partnered with Sexual Assault Survivors' Centre (SASC) on this anti-human trafficking research project with the hope to assess and enhance the community's understanding of the hidden nature of this societal problem. The difficulty of this assessment was highlighted by a local Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) officer who referred to human trafficking (HT) as "an invisible problem in our community, it is like chasing ghosts" (D. Grisewood, personal communication, May 2020). Angie Marks, the SASC and Women's Interval Home Executive Director, believes that HT is a growing concern based on the increasing number of girls and women seeking support after exiting or escaping sexual exploitation (personal communication, February 2020). The SASC reported working with 13 survivors in 2017, eight (8) survivors in 2018 and 14 survivors in 2019 (A. Marks, personal communication, February 2020).

This research project hopes to explore the current knowledge amongst Community Service Providers (CSP), identifying gaps in services and the needs for victims and survivors. This study is also giving survivors the opportunity to have their voices heard and identify their needs in terms of prevention strategies, protection initiatives and aftercare support once they exited HT. survivor's experiences in HT shape the vision of what victims and survivors really need. Overall, the project sought input from four different demographic groups to identify needs and explore prevention strategies to protect vulnerable and oppressed populations who are most at risk of being sexually exploited and recruited into HT. The research team developed recommendations for reducing risks of exploitation of vulnerable populations, preventative measures and ideas

and opportunities for enhancement and development of programming to support victims and survivors of HT in Sarnia-Lambton and its Indigenous communities.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The main objective was to explore strategies on prevention, empowerment and support for vulnerable populations, victims and survivors of HT in Sarnia-Lambton and its Indigenous and Francophone communities. Over the two (2) years, this project involved working with four different demographic groups. Each group required its own research design to collect relevant data and information for the study. Consultation and input were gathered from staff at the SASC, survivors, CSP and senior staff members from First Nations communities in the design of each group's research methodology. Qualitative research methodology was used in all four demographic groups.

- 1) Sarnia-Lambton CSP--70 CSP participated in the study. The data was obtained and conducted in an interview using a questionnaire. Interviews were with experienced senior staff or a designated representative from a variety of organizations throughout the community.
- 2) Survivors of HT—12 Survivors participated in the study, who were voluntary participants and were referred by different CSP. Their insight and experience were collected from interviews involving a questionnaire that allowed the survivor to share their story in a safe area with the support of their counsellor.
- 3) Lambton College Students—126 students participated in the study using questionnaire via Survey Monkey. Students participated on a voluntary basis and completed the questionnaire using an iPad. Students also had the opportunity to attend 2 public education sessions on HT at the College to learn more about this hidden problem.
- 4) Local First Nations Communities- Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, Aamjiwnaang First Nation Chippewas of Sarnia and Walpole Island First Nation-

Bkejwanong Territory and Urban Indigenous members—26 Indigenous CSP and 58 Indigenous community members participated in this study. The data and information were collected in two groups 1) CSP departments and 2) Community Members. Each of the First Nations Communities received their own individual report. For the Final Report, the data from all three (3) Indigenous communities and Urban Indigenous members was collated and analyzed together.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION

This project explored and collected data, information, stories and experiences from more than 300 individuals in Sarnia-Lambton who participated in this research study regarding HT from 2018-2020. The participants came from diverse backgrounds. These included; professionals from social services, health care providers, front line workers, politicians, police, educators, advocates, survivors, college students, francophone members and members from First Nations communities who contributed to the research through an interview and/or questionnaire. Many also attended education sessions the research team and SASC offered either at their workplace or in a public community setting. The participant's insight and knowledge that was shared, will benefit the work currently being done in this community to support victims and survivors of HT.

SURVIVORS EMPOWERMENT

The research team learned a great deal from the survivors interviewed for this research project. Importantly, the team learned to be compassionate and understanding of the trauma survivors have endured when being exploited by their traffickers. Anyone can be at risk of trafficking and end up as a victim, HT does not discriminate. Survivors hold the shame and fear from the trauma they have experienced while being sexually exploited in HT. An ineffective justice

system that doesn't appear to protect victims, a court system that relies heavily on a victim recounting again and again their testimony, in order to prosecute a trafficker, and the violent threats victims have endured in order to stay alive in the dangerous world of trafficking. When full of shame and guilt, the survivor goes underground carrying the tremendous burden of their traumatic experience with them. Fearing retribution from their trafficker, survivors are too afraid to speak out. If they do reach out it tends to be to get help with their basic needs; food, shelter and clothing. Survivors will seek out crisis centres, as they are easy to access, have no fees, and can be confidential so their privacy is protected. Survivors also require intensive trauma counselling and often need addictions counselling as well.

Of the survivors interviewed, once they escaped or exited their situation, they sought help and services in their home community of Sarnia-Lambton. Initially, they needed to meet their basic needs - food, shelter and clothing. The survivors also required safety and protection upon exiting/escaping HT. However, only two (2) of the 12 survivors in this study sought help from the police. The rest were fearful of what might happen to them if they did seek police assistance. Only one (1) of those two (2) cases went forward with charges and prosecution of the trafficker.

Numerous survivors have shared that their participation in this research has empowered them to cultivate their thoughts and allowed their voices to be heard. Some of the survivors in this study were ready to publicly speak out and share their story in an effort to prevent and protect others falling victim to sexual exploitation. These survivors reported feeling heard and detached from their past experience rather than emotionally triggered by it. For some, it helped with their healing journey and put more closure and distance between their lives now and their experience then. They were all courageous and motivated to help and share their wisdom and insights about the gaps in services and needs for victims and survivors of HT in their community.

COMMUNITY SERVICE PROVIDERS IN SARNIA-LAMBTON AND FIRST NATIONS

Over the past two (2) years, the research team also met with 70 CSP in Sarnia-Lambton with 75% indicating they are working with victims who they believe have been involved in sexual HT. The research team also met with 19 Indigenous CSP departments from all three 3) First Nations communities as well as seven (7) Urban Indigenous outreach services in Sarnia-Lambton for a total of 26 local Indigenous CSP. The CSP all indicated they too are working with victims who are currently being exploited or have been exploited by traffickers.

Yet, local police data for investigations and charges of HT do not reflect these high numbers observed by our social and health care providers. In 2018, Sarnia Police Services and OPP, together charged 5 individuals with trafficking of persons and in 2019 combined, they laid 2 charges to individuals with trafficking of persons (A. Taylor and L. Horan, personal communication, June 2020; D. Whelpley, personal communication, May 2020). This poses a challenge to every community across Canada regarding the significant low numbers of individuals being charged with trafficking versus the high number of people who have reported being sexually exploited in trafficking. Unfortunately, the research team was unable to obtain any data from Walpole Island and Kettle and Stony Point police detachments which has limited the information of the problem in those two communities.

Police acknowledge HT is an underreported crime and shared the challenges they face with tracking and prosecuting HT cases. Police report they are only scratching the surface, as victims are often too afraid to report HT and to testify against their trafficker. Unfortunately, the Canadian legal system is solely reliant on the victim's testimony in order to prosecute the trafficker, especially when the victim often does not even see themselves as having been

trafficked. Police need more time and energy to be able to dedicate additional surveillance to the problem as it is a disguised crime often linked with other criminal activities involving fraud, theft, identity theft, domestic violence, sexual assault, drugs and weapons.

For First Nations communities, HT is also an underreported crime. First Nations police services are often understaffed, underfunded, under-resourced and have unsafe working conditions. This results in their inability to respond appropriately and investigate violence and exploitation to Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019a, p. 690). The significant gaps between the low numbers of investigations and charges of HT, and the high numbers who are believed to be victims and survivors of HT by the CSP departments and community members reveals these challenges are faced for every community across the country.

RISK FACTORS

There are over 60 risk factors identified by all CSP that could put an individual at risk of HT, the Indigenous CSP and members indicated 40 different risk factors. These high numbers of risk factors translate into anyone can be a potential target. There is no definitive answer that makes identifying a potential victim of HT transparent. However, CSP did report that they believe vulnerable and marginalized populations are most often targeted by traffickers. Traffickers prey on the vulnerabilities of at-risk populations including youth, women, homeless, poverty, mental health, addictions, low self-esteem, runaways, 2SLGBTQQIA immigrants, refugees and Indigenous populations.

RECRUITMENT AND LURING STRATEGIES BY TRAFFICKERS

Traffickers recruit their victims using manipulative and devious tactics to engage and exploit women, youth and those who are most vulnerable. Marginalized and oppressed populations are

most often targeted by traffickers. Many of the survivors who participated in this study were young when they entered HT, some as early as 14 years old but others were recruited when they were older, one in her early 30's. The average age of recruitment in this study was 22 years. All of the survivors met their trafficker with hopes and promises to fulfill their dreams in unique and persuasive ways. 67% of the survivors did not know they were being trafficked at the time, adding to their vulnerability and dependency on the trafficker. All of the survivors stated they lived in fear most of the time, as they often felt abused, threatened, coerced, isolated and controlled by their trafficker.

GAPS IN SERVICES AND SUPPORT SERVICES NEEDED

All communities indicated the need to continue their efforts to combat the fight of HT including public awareness campaigns, more education and training to CSP, adding HT curriculum in the schools, safe housing for survivors, enhanced detox and addictions counselling, life skills support, free and accessible long-term counselling. Enhancing these programs and supports for survivors will lead to greater collaboration amongst our CSP ensuring effective service delivery. Local CSP in both Sarnia-Lambton and First Nations communities continue to be concerned about working with victims who are currently being exploited or have been exploited by traffickers. Gaps in services and challenges were addressed by all CSP including the need for a community protocol on HT. This protocol would enhance cooperation and collaboration of services to best meet the needs and support of survivors.

FIRST NATIONS NEEDS

In addition, the First Nations communities also emphasized the need to return to Indigenous cultural teachings; traditional roots, culture, language and spiritual healing was identified as essential for healing. Their insight, knowledge and desire to help their community members was inspiring. 58 Indigenous members voluntarily participated in this research and shared their

wisdom and experience on what they believe is needed in their communities. They identified the need to strive for 'harmony' in each community and work collaboratively together as this harmony will heal victims and survivors of HT. Returning to the origins of Anishnawbe culture and the foundational Ojibway tradition of the Seven Grandfather teachings will help people find harmony (Wagamese, 2019, p. 13). These traditional teachings are valued and will help in healing and connecting back with traditional culture. "We become one drum beating together in a common purpose—and we are healed" (Wagamese, 2019, p. 28).

The local First Nations communities have a strong desire to protect vulnerable members and committed to working towards prevention strategies to deter recruitment and exploitation of at risk and marginalized populations. According to the Native Women's Association of Canada, survivors are strongly encouraged to have a role in facilitating change in their community (2014, p. 21).

It is important to get the message out to everyone in the community of Sarnia-Lambton and in the First Nations communities that everyone has a responsibility to report suspicious behavior that could put vulnerable and disadvantaged populations at risk of exploitation. Everyone is responsible for becoming more aware of the growing problem of HT, understanding the warning signs and making the community a safer place. The Canada-wide HT hotline is a helpful resource to victims and survivors, this 24-hour crisis phone number needs to be visible in all communities.

COLLEGE STUDENT AWARENESS

The research project also involved over 200 Lambton College students with public awareness training on HT, which included powerful presentations from two local survivors. Students also volunteered to complete a questionnaire about their knowledge on HT. The research concluded

there is a general overall knowledge of HT amongst the college population. Students also have some insight on what to do if someone they know is at-risk of exploitation or requires help or services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the two years of this research project, a great deal of valuable information was gathered from participants involving their stories and experiences as well as the literature review on HT. The work was completed in the hope of identifying prevention strategies, addressing gaps in services and providing ideas for the enhancement of supportive initiatives in terms of programming for victims and survivors of HT. Both Survivors and CSP shared their experiences with the team that included barriers, support services that were both helpful and not helpful and ideas for improvement of services needed in the Sarnia-Lambton communities. The recommendations are a true reflection of what was shared and learned by the research team on HT in Sarnia-Lambton. The recommendations are divided into four categories that are derived from the project's objectives and are as followed: 1) Knowledge and Prevention Services 2) Gaps in Services and Support Services Needed 3) Empowerment for Survivors and 4) First Nation Communities. Some of the key recommendations highlighted are as followed:

1) KNOWLEDGE AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS:

GENERAL PUBLIC:

- Providing education and awareness so that the public can better identify risk factors, warning signs and recruitment strategies by traffickers and the dangers.
- Increase community knowledge on "First Point of Access" for victims and survivors to help navigate their access to appropriate and available services. Improved information to the public about recognizing an individual at risk and appropriate reporting procedures.

ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY:

- Training sessions for staff working in hotels, bars, casinos, restaurants and highway rest stops about HT on the warning signs and recruitment strategies.
- Production and distribution of printed media awareness materials to be placed in public washrooms, billboards on highways, social media, news ads and commercials educating the public of the problem.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

- Family and friends need to have access to public forums to learn about warning signs, risk factors, recruitment strategies and what to do if they believe their loved one is at risk or currently involved in HT.
- The need to monitor children and youth in social media access, online gaming activities that involve chat lines and overall internet use to keep them safe from traffickers who recruit online.
- Encourage children and youth to report suspicious behaviour to a trusting adult.

EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS:

- Continue to offer HT awareness days teaching about warning signs, risk factors, recruitment strategies and safety planning.
- The need for funding to support modules on HT to be included in regular curriculum and lessons appropriate to each age level.

SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS:

- Offering ongoing education and training workshops for staff so that they are better able to identify HT amongst the clients they are working with.
- Education on asking the right questions so that clients feel safe to disclose and share their experience so they can access appropriate support services

JUSTICE SYSTEM:

- Further training and education for police, prosecutors, judges on the risk factors, what to look for, recruitment strategies, support strategies and dangers to victims and survivors about HT.
- More information to Police about social and health care resources available to victims and survivors.
- A legal system that is not solely reliant of the victim's testimony for prosecuting the trafficker, when the victim may not even see themselves as being trafficked.
- Continue programs, for example, 'knock and talk' initiatives where OPP, Sarnia Police Services and Victim Services work together proactively on investigations at local motels.

CONSUMERS (AKA JOHN'S):

- Humanize the sex trade industry by putting a face on the victim, indicating this girl could be someone you know.
- Increase public awareness in hopes the message of anti-HT will reach consumers who purchase sex. Awareness to the consumer that most victims are not voluntary participants but are coerced, threatened and controlled by a

trafficker and forced into offering sex. Most consumers are not aware that the victim does not get full payment for their services.

2) GAPS IN SERVICES AND SUPPORT SERVICES NEEDED:

SAFE HOUSING:

- The need for safe transitional housing for victims and survivors was identified by the majority of key stakeholders in this study.
- Support services that offer short term housing, life skills, addictions counselling career assessments, job search skills, return to school initiatives, and resume building etc.

TRAUMA COUNSELLING SERVICES:

- The need for trauma-informed practice in counselling services as the majority of survivors have experienced a great deal of trauma.
- CSP could all benefit from utilization of the Family Services of Peel Assessment Trauma Screening as a tool to help identify red flags that the client they are working may have been exploited in HT.
- There is a need for more mental health crisis workers to work alongside the police to ensure appropriate support services are available to them.

ADDICTIONS COUNSELLING SERVICES:

- Enhancement of detox and addictions counselling for survivors. Many survivors also exit HT with an addiction problem.

COMMUNITY PROTOCOL AND COLLABORATION:

- Sarnia-Lambton could benefit from a coordinated effort to develop a community protocol for HT. This can ensure that victims and survivors can be directed to the first point of access to support services. A protocol provides for open communication and direction with a step by step process for the correct conduct and procedures for providers to follow. This wrap around approach increases the sharing of resources, appropriate referrals are made, which ultimately benefits the victims and survivors.

3) EMPOWERMENT OF SURVIVORS

- Survivors have the vision to lead the path for new initiatives in communities. By using their voice to share their story, teaches them to become advocates for change.
- Survivors need to be encouraged to reach out, be assured they are not alone and support is available if they ask for it. Appreciating self-worth, life skill sessions that help build self-esteem and confidence so they are able to believe in themselves and recognize that they are and worth helping.
- Survivors have identified the need for peer support group counselling, a safe place to disclose and share confidentially their past experience with trafficking. The peer support group allows the survivor to share without being judged, validate feelings, support one another and heal together, possibility of a drop in peer support program.

4) FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

It is concerning that research studies have indicated that there is an overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls who are sexually exploited in Canada. Although this research project did not measure the extent of the problem in terms of actual numbers of women and vulnerable populations exploited, it was able to gather information from CSP about what they were seeing in their caseloads as it relates to HT. All three local Indigenous communities indicated that the problem exists in their community and is becoming a growing concern amongst all members. The following recommendations come from both the literature review and First Nations members and CSP and are as followed:

- Public awareness and education as a community wide prevention strategy was highlighted as a priority both in person education and in print awareness campaigns. The programs would include information on warning signs, risk factors and recruitment strategies.
- Look to the survivors for their insight, wisdom and understanding of the problem to help initiate programs and services that can support others and change lives as survivors hold the expertise on what services are needed in the community.
- Provide gender and cultural based training of HT for police and officers of the court, so they can be advocates and protectors of victims and survivors rather than further adding to the trauma of women and girls through arrests and blaming.
- Provide culturally relevant traditional teachings and healing methods that support Indigenous-specific prevention and awareness programs.
- Trauma-informed counselling services that is also cultural-based and gender based able to support a survivor with cultural and gender sensitivity.
- Provide financial support for survivor's transition to a new life, who may require emergency funding for a safe place to live and relocate and access basic needs.

- Engage youth in open discussions to help determine obstacles and solutions that could prevent HT or assist others exiting HT.
- Look to broader issues that may be contributing to conditions that foster exploitation such as poverty, racial injustice, loss of culture, loss of language, loss of identity, residential schools and colonization.
- Development of a community protocol specific to each First Nations Community to enhance service delivery, collaboration and communication amongst service providers.
- Implementation of Ontario Native Women's Association anti-HT framework wrap-around approach to enhance collaboration of service providers. It would include a system of policies and programs that are designed from an Indigenous perspective.
- Provide emergency and transitional short term safe housing for victims and survivors.
- A confidential and safe place for survivors to talk and disclose in their community.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this research project, HT was continuously referenced as a hidden societal problem. It is a very profitable and disguised crime. The study learned about the emotional and physical trauma experienced by survivors, the numerous factors that can put anyone at risk of trafficking, the manipulative tactics of traffickers who recruit and lure vulnerable populations, the gaps in services in the community and the support services required to protect victims and survivors in Sarnia-Lambton. Public awareness and education for all population groups about HT was consistently recommended as the number one need for Sarnia-Lambton, in order to combat the fight against HT.

Over the two (2) years, the research team gained insight into the dangerous lives lived by survivors. Many didn't even know they were being exploited at the time and truly believed in their 'boyfriend relationship.' Only as survivors began to learn about sexual exploitation did they come to realize they were actually exploited and trafficked. These survivors hold the vision from their experiences of what is needed in the community. They have become the voice for this research, and are truly the change agents for Sarnia-Lambton.

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