

HUMAN **PART 2** TRAFFICKING

One young woman whom everyone simply calls 'T' - had a difficult and dangerous childhood. Her parents who were addicted to drugs, neglected her as a toddler. Eventually she was put into foster care moving from home to home. Then, at the age of ten, T was trafficked into prostitution. Her trafficker manipulated her, promising to care for and protect her which was something she'd never known. But over time he beat her if she didn't bring home enough money. When T was 17, a social worker helped her escape her trafficker. Since then she has dedicated herself to helping other victims of trafficking. She is a board member of a human rights organization and also mentors fellow survivors and speaks up on their behalf. She says "my definition of freedom is deeper than most. For so long, my freedom was non-existent. My every move was watched, my every conversation was observed. My clothing and food portions and options were at the mercy of another. Living in fear and terror, my physical self seemed to belong to everyone but me."

TIME TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Martina came to North America from Nigeria in 1988. She was a widow with two children. Martina arrived believing that she would earn \$300 a month working for a Nigerian-American couple. The couple also told her that they would help pay for her children to go to school back in Nigeria. In return, Martina had to spend long days cleaning house, caring for the couple's children and cooking for the family. Martina did the work but the couple never paid her the money she had been promised. In fact, she says she worked for 12 years without ever being paid at all. She finally left the family in 2000 with the help and support of friends she had made outside the home. However, Martina remained afraid to tell the police what she had gone through. "I did not want to have a bad name" she said. Martina still lives in North America and still works caring for children, but she is now free and she is paid for her work.





Last time we talked about human trafficking in a post COVID-19 world. We talked about what it looks like now, who the victims are and how the pandemic changed the way we look at these type of crimes. As you can see from the two stories above, we're going to get a little bit more personal this month. Now that you've read the experiences of these two victims/survivors we're going to talk just a little bit about how people become victims and the process by which they are lured. Then we're gonna tell you how you can make a difference by learning how to spot trafficking victims so that you can speak up on their behalf. And finally, the newest member of our Crimewatch writing team - EDC Slobodian is going to share his feelings about this topic as he researched it for the first time.

LET'S GO

Cooking up a storm, the recipe for a perfect crime.

Whether pre- pandemic, mid- pandemic or post - pandemic - as far as the grim details are concerned, Covid changed very little in the tried and true formula for human trafficking. People don't fix what isn't broken and so far, what has always worked still does. As it has always, trafficking starts with a simple conversation between the target and the bait.

A commissioned report on Human Trafficking Corridors in Canada calls the 'bait' or lure a "Romeo, pimp/boyfriend or trafficker". These are men that position themselves as potential relationship prospects for the victims and enter what look like consensual intimate partnerships with the victim before they start convincing or coercing them into the commercial sex industry. These 'boyfriends' - usually older men shower the victims with compliments, listen sympathetically to their troubles, and dazzle with sex, money, gifts, drugs and sometimes promises of music or modeling careers.

Before the pandemic and now again in 2024, domestic trafficking victims are often young women and girls approached in disadvantaged neighborhoods or crowded malls. 'Boyfriend' lures target girls who look poor, vulnerable or who look like they have low self-esteem.

Once the honeymoon is over, however, the victims will be cajoled into performing sex work to aid their lovers

who are in a 'pinch' financially or who owe drug debts. The victims came to trust their 'knights in shining armor' over time as they were slowly convinced that the scenarios they found themselves in were normal and that the things they were asked to do were things that a good girlfriend does for a boyfriend who loves her. As they are increasingly isolated and conditioned, the vise eventually closes and they are told that they now owe their own drug debt and room and board or that they are now into the 'industry' too deep to get out and if they tried, they'd be punished by law enforcement. The humiliation, debasement, emotional and physical abuse begin often with threats that the victims' families will pay if they do not carry out orders. Some victims also hang on because they are promised a cut of the proceeds from their exploitation but of course they never see this in reality.

In Covid land, everything about this process remained the same except for the method of first contact. Instead of person to person, the two parties encountered each other on the World

Wide Web, usually on social media platforms. "It's easier for traffickers to sit behind a computer screen and... reach out to multiple people, hoping that one or two bite" says Karly Church, a crisis intervention counselor with victim Services of Durham, and a victim of human trafficking herself. "Traffickers are taking advantage of this time where vulnerable people are at home and online and that really makes our work feel much more urgent." Opines country music singer Paul Brandt who has been leading a committee to help guide Alberta's fight against



the crime for almost a year. Being a former pediatric nurse, he founded the organization Not in my City in 2017 with his wife Liz to create awareness and bring together those fighting human trafficking and sex exploitation. Ultimately, however, post-pandemic there is a foolproof recipe for cooking up human trafficking.

THE RECIPE GOES LIKE THIS

Ingredients:

1 or more groomers/fake boyfriends/lures - 97% of the victims know this person well by the time captivity begins.

1 or more Middlemen to handle the housekeeping details such as keeping the books, booking the hotels and vehicles, managing the travel routes, feeding the victims, getting them ready for clients and arranging the appointments.

1 head honcho who pays the bills. This is the guy who runs several different human trafficking circles

with victims in the triple digits or higher. This is the guy that the middleman gets the money from to keep the scam going, and this is the guy who takes all the profits and pays all the players.

Put these three ingredients together and mix to get a complete trap for the unsuspecting victims. Time to add:

Victims: as many as can be found - put them into the above mix and let sit awhile. The result will be complete conditioning and fear.

The icing on this particular cake is the buyer:

Sex Buyers: an endless horde that have only one thing in common - they don't care where their sex comes from as long as it is affordable and attractive.

And now as we set our mixture to cook, we place it in the oven - the most important step in the process to solidify the product. In this case, the proverbial oven would be the public. The people who look the other way, the people who see disheveled young women and girls with frightened eyes and malnourished bodies hurry around with much older men who are clearly not their family;



and do nothing. These are the people who live in houses and apartments adjacent to the locations where the victims are kept, people who notice men coming in and out at all hours of the day, people who hear women scream, but never see those women. They are the people who never question the world around them. Don't be this person! Be the person that victims can look to for help.

HOW TO BE THE PERSON

A peer outreach worker and trafficking survivor with the Halifax YMCA states "I heard once, if you can't find the person, be the person. When I was 13, I couldn't find that person. So for me, I want to be that person. So that other kids don't have to experience some of the horrors and traumas that I have."

The following list of how to spot trafficking victims come from Benjamin Perrin's excellent book *Invisible Chains: Canada's Underground World of Human Trafficking* (2010). It offers a good primer on trafficking and the traditional ways victims have been spotted.

Fourteen ways to spot a domestic sex trafficking victim:

1. Lack of control over schedule or identification documents.
2. Unexplained absences from school or work, or failure to attend on a regular basis.
3. Chronic running away from home.
4. Reference to frequent travel to other cities, along with excessive amounts of cash or multiple hotel room keys.
5. Signs of trauma: bruising, withdrawn behavior, depression or fear.
6. Signs of branding (i.e. tattoos).
7. Lying about age and carrying false identification.
8. Inconsistencies in stories or explanations, along with restricted or obviously scripted communication.
9. Irregular physical appearance: hungry or malnourished, inappropriately dressed.
10. Troubled demeanor: anxiety, depression, submissive behavior, tension, nervousness, inability to make eye contact.
11. Being watched or monitored by someone, or appearing to have an overly controlling and abusive 'boyfriend'.
12. Spending significant periods of time with a new friend or boyfriend.
13. Displaying expensive gifts, such as an item of clothing, jewelry, or a cell phone with no apparent source of income to justify them.
14. Substance abuse and addiction.

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SAY SOMETHING

- If you are in one of Canada's human trafficking hubs i.e. large cities such as Toronto, Edmonton, Vancouver or Halifax, or any community on the US/Canada border, pay close attention. If you work in a hotel, live or work in a large apartment complex, or have neighbors that behave in a way that suggests ongoing problems, say something! If you travel, keep watch at airports and large bus stations. Keep an eye open also at schools, hospitals, and doctor's offices.
- Be wary of people whom you know reside in a particular property but who only ever go outside - even to their yard or balcony, with chaperones - usually male ones, or other scared looking females who all answer to a man.
- Be wary if you hear repeated instances of yelling where it seems like only one person is doing all the talking and they sound very aggressive.
- Watch for women and girls who cannot communicate in English or French at all as language learning resources may be being withheld.
- Try keep note of women around you who live with

standoffish, brusque, private to the point of paranoia and/or heavily chauvinistic men. These men may appear flashy but are often rude and live under the radar/off the grid. Some of these men may just be your average jerk next door but maybe not.

-Bear in mind that your children still spend a lot of time online and that social media is now the prime hunting ground for traffickers. The dark web is where the planning is happening and sites such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X are the places where there's trouble brewing. Also beware dating sites and apps such as Tinder and Plenty of Fish as they are hunting grounds for older women.

Trust is a huge barrier to the help that victims need. Not only are they convinced by their captors that local law enforcement and health care agencies are useless, inept and possibly corrupt; but they are also told that since what they are doing is illegal that they are the ones who will be arrested rather than their pimps. They are told that nobody will believe them or have any sympathy for them. They will be looked down upon and will never be able to advance in society. To add to this distrust, victims see people going about normal lives unaware of their plights. From the windows of motel rooms, apartments and 'micro-brothel' houses they see people being free and independent - none of

whom recognize what is going on around them.

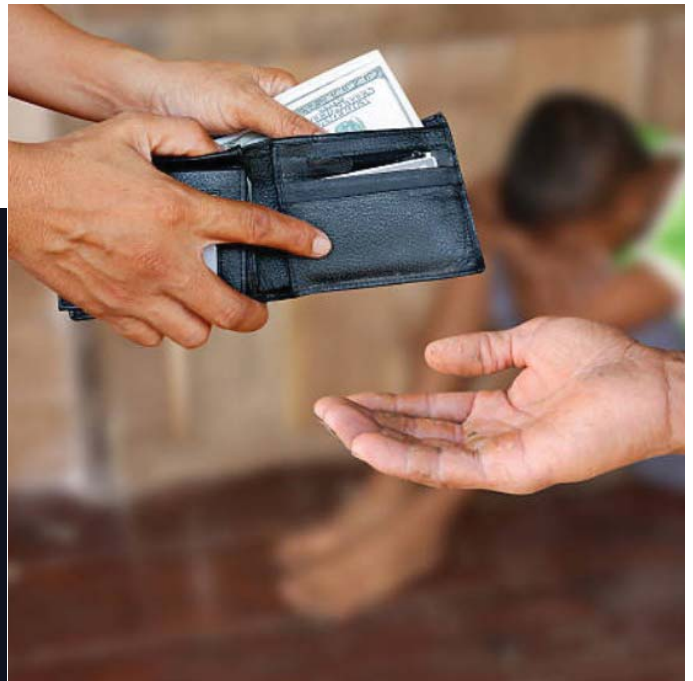
The more arrests seen, the more help given, the more awareness shown, the more trust we foster in victims and survivors and perhaps the more courage they gain to step forward or escape.

The national human trafficking hotline is 1-833-900-1010 or canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca

DURING YOUR TRAVELS

Now that airports, bus depots and train stations are bustling hubs again, it is more vital than ever to watch what is happening around you as you navigate your way through the world.

1. Older people traveling with younger children if they don't appear to be related. The children will often speak a different language than their companion and will look worried and confused.



2. Traffickers will keep their victims VERY close and not allow them to move around at all. Look for children and teens who look genuinely terrified as opposed to tired or surly. The former will often be far quieter than the latter.

3. Look for signs of physical abuse - this is important in any context. Burns and scars are common as well as bruises. Victims will also look malnourished and generally unhealthy.

4. Victims do not know any details of their travel itinerary. They will not have their own travel documents with them either.

5. Victims will have extremely limited interaction with others - they will aggressively avoid eye contact and any casual chit chat. Many traffickers tell their victims exactly what to say to other travelers to avoid suspicion.

6. Certain tattoos can be a sign. Traffickers feel like they own their victims and may 'brand' them, especially before transport. If you see a name, barcode, symbol, even the word 'daddy' that is poorly rendered, or very age inappropriate, pay attention

7. It is important to call the police immediately if you are suspicious. Traffickers can move fast. See if you can discretely approach a victim when they are in a public bathroom and subtly offer assistance.

TRAFFICKING IN CANADA

By EDC Slobodian

In my opinion, human trafficking is one of humanity's most sinister webs of exploitation and suffering. It casts an ominous shadow across a nation, and as I delved into the depths of this issue, I discovered many stories of victims who have endured unimaginable pain, right here in Canada.

Canada is often celebrated for its multiculturalism, compassion, maple syrup, and hockey. Yet, like many other countries, Canada harbors its own spooky secrets. In the shadows of our bustling streets, in the cracks of our picturesque landscapes, lies a disgusting underworld where human lives are for sale and trade.

Young victims fall prey to pied pipers who exploit their dreams, desperation, and innocence. These traffickers operate slyly and hide in plain sight. They are closer than you think.

The victims of human trafficking are our neighbors, friends, and fellow citizens. Picture a teen girl lured by false promises of a better, glamorous life, only to find herself trapped in a cycle of horrifying sexual abuse. Imagine a migrant worker, now toiling in a factory, stripped of their basic rights.

Whether it is sexual servitude, forced labor, or some other type of exploitation, victims of this type of crime are just vulnerable individuals looking for a break, or a change in their lives. Some are trying to escape already terrible situations and have no choice but to comply. Many victims are blackmailed by threats of deportation back to another country where there were fleeing even more desperate circumstances. This fact angers me the most because one day I may want to emigrate to another country and with this knowledge in the back of my mind - that this kind of abuse happens the world over - that is less likely. From 2011 to 2021, there were 3,541 police-reported incidents of human trafficking in Canada. The vast majority (96%) of these victims were women and girls.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Awareness is our first line of defense. We must shatter the illusion that human trafficking doesn't happen here. It does. It thrives in our cities, suburbs, and rural communities.

Schools, workplaces, and community centers—all must become battlegrounds against this insipid crime. Educate everyone you can or anyone who will listen. Recognize the signs and get inquisitive — ask questions; you might be the only person helping.





In 2019 the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline was launched and has been a lifeline for so many victims. The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline is a confidential, multilingual service, operating 24/7 to connect victims and survivors to resources, legal aid, and emotional support and they will take tips from the public.

Call 1-(833)-900-1010, (24 hours/day-7 days a week), or use the chat function on their website: <https://www.canadian-humantraffickinghotline.ca>

But the hotline's ringing phones reveal a harsh truth; the battle is far from won. We must advocate for stronger legislation, ensuring traffickers are caught and prosecuted. Support local organizations that rescue and rehabilitate victims. Educate yourself by reading about the topic, and sourcing local resources to help educate others. Most importantly, we need to amplify the voices of survivors because they are our greatest teachers.

Human trafficking and exploitation is not a distant problem. It is not something that happens somewhere else. It happens right here. It happens everywhere. It is a disgusting, sticky, smelly stain on our collective conscience. Let us rise above general apathy and indifference; together, we can dismantle this cruel industry one rescued life at a time. The fight against human trafficking requires ongoing efforts from all of us.

