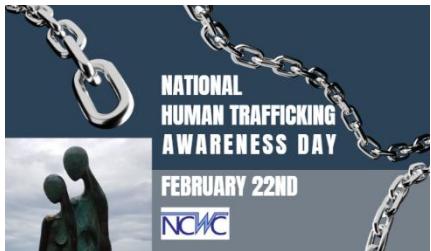


Human Trafficking in Canada: What You Need to Know



Human trafficking in Canada looks nothing like most people imagine. The majority of victims are Canadian-born, female, and young, often minors, exploited in the same cities, towns, and communities where they grew up. But domestic exploitation isn't the whole picture. Canada also sees foreign nationals who enter specifically to exploit women and girls, using tourist or visitor status as cover while operating in urban centres where demand is high and detection is difficult.

Traffickers rarely use force to recruit. The most common method is relationship-based: someone offers attention, affection, and a sense of belonging to a young person who has little of it. Trust is built gradually, dependency follows, and by the time control is established, leaving feels impossible. Social media has expanded this reach dramatically. Recruiters can now identify and target vulnerable youth with minimal risk and no geographic limits.

Vulnerability is not random. Young women and girls are most frequently targeted when they are navigating poverty, housing instability, prior abuse or neglect, or involvement in the child welfare system, particularly those who have aged out without stable support. Substance use, social isolation, and the absence of trusted adults all compound the risk. Indigenous girls and young women are significantly overrepresented, facing overlapping structural vulnerabilities across nearly every category traffickers deliberately seek out.

Traffickers also introduce substance dependency as a control mechanism. Addiction here is a strategy, not a side effect, and it shapes how hard leaving becomes, and how long recovery takes.



Canada's Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA) criminalizes the purchase of sexual services while decriminalizing the sale, with the intent of suppressing demand and reducing exploitation. Its effectiveness is genuinely debated. Some advocates argue it pushes transactions underground, making safety harder to maintain and help harder to access. What remains consistent is that survivors frequently avoid police contact out of fear or distrust, which limits their access to services precisely when they need them most.

Many survivors also carry criminal records for offences tied directly to their own exploitation, charges that follow them long after the trafficking ends.

Awareness means understanding the full picture.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Abel NCWC VP

In keeping with NCWC policies, we reaffirm our strong commitment to raising awareness and engaging with all levels of government to strengthen and enforce laws, hold traffickers accountable, and support both service providers and survivors through culturally appropriate services and partnerships. We call for renewed action to uphold the dignity and rights of all—especially the women and girls most affected by human trafficking.