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Finding Our Voices: Lived experiences in human trafficking

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On behalf of Voice Found for the Department of Justice Canada

Voice Found.

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Finding Our Voices: Lived experiences in human trafficking

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Voice Found is a registered charity that serves individuals who may be at risk of, who have been, or who are being trafficked for sex and/or labour.¹ Only those clients who have experienced sex trafficking were included in this research to provide insight into their lives at the time of first being trafficked, during trafficking, their experiences as they exited, and their lives after exiting.

Methods

Twenty-two (22) participants, including two (2) professionals working in the field of anti-human trafficking and twenty (20) of Voice Found's clients, were invited by Voice Found's Director of Anti-Human Trafficking, and principal researcher, to participate as lived experienced experts in semi-structured qualitative interviews for this research.

Section One: Sample characteristics

The participants include twenty-one (21) females and one (1) trans female. The majority of participants were first trafficked between the ages of thirteen (13) and eighteen (18), trafficked more than once, and all but one participant indicated that they attempted to exit more than once. When they did exit successfully, half of the participants said they did so on their own without support.

Section Two: Beginning of trafficking

Many participants describe an intersection of challenging home environments, negative or poor relationships with family, and lack of positive social support all resulting in extreme vulnerability. Just under half of participants indicated that nothing was positive in their lives at the time they were trafficked. Traffickers, whether posing as boyfriends, friends, strangers, drug dealers, or acquaintances, exploited this vulnerability for their own gain by promising a better life, easy money, or a lavish lifestyle and instead took the earnings of these survivors for themselves.

Section Three: During and exiting trafficking

All of the participants experienced violence from both traffickers and johns, and the majority of participants indicated that they had been forced to provide sexual services with someone else. Some participants were given the choice to work with someone else, and a few said they chose to do so for increased safety. Some participants had assistance from an anti-human trafficking police unit while they were being trafficked, but the majority of participants were unaware of any support. Participants indicated that the most helpful supports they received were lived experience case management or peer support, therapy, and trauma-informed medical care.

Section Four: After exiting trafficking

The most common current positive influences include family and friends and/or healthy social relationships. Human trafficking specific support, therapy, and lived experience support² in particular were identified as the most helpful support that participants had received since exiting. The majority of participants indicated that they had engaged in consensual sex work after exiting, and two (2) indicated that they had a "sugar daddy".³ To help overcome the current challenges they are facing financially, over a quarter of participants

¹ At risk includes youth involved in the child welfare system, poverty, involvement in the sex trade (both consensual and circumstantial) as well as many other targeting factors.

² A support worker who has been trafficked and who provides services to victims of human trafficking.

³ A sugar daddy is an older male who provides financial benefit for an individual to spend time with him. They may have dinners together, accompany him to events and essentially have a financially dependent relationship. This arrangement may include sexual

mentioned that they have thought about or are considering getting back into sex work independently because of the money that can be made.

Section Five: From survivors

Participants were asked what they would tell politicians and bureaucrats if they could speak to them directly. Many participants indicated that there is not enough education, awareness, and prevention of trafficking, particularly for at-risk youth. Many said that there is not enough social and financial support available to effectively promote well-being in the short or long term, which only adds to the trauma that survivors experience. Participants also mentioned the need to protect and support sex workers.

Discussion and Conclusion

This report concludes with a synthesis of findings and reflections on their significance.

- **First, this research identified that minors are most at risk of being trafficked.** Traffickers appear to exploit the vulnerability of minors, preying upon individuals who do not have positive emotional and social connections with family or other relationships.
- **Second, there is no one cause for trafficking to occur, but an unstable or negative family life is a common factor.** The responses of participants indicate that as youth these survivors did not grow up in a nourishing and safe environment within which to develop into regulated and healthy individuals.
- **Third, lived experience and trauma-informed care are key supports for survivors of human trafficking.** Survivors repeated throughout this study that the best care they received was from trauma-informed staff and particularly staff with lived experience of human trafficking.
- **Finally, financial stress is a significant pressure in the lives of survivors after exiting trafficking, which may lead to re-entering sex work and possible re-exploitation.** The most common and significant challenges that participants currently face are addressing mental health issues, how to develop healthy friendships/relationships, limited finances, and managing the symptoms of trauma.

favours and may have specific parameters around how often they see each other. Some of these arrangements have very specific guidelines on how much the sugar daddy pays the individual and how often. Payment might be in the form of cash or gifts.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Justice Canada has contracted community-based research to better understand the lives of individuals involved in the sex trade. The former 2014 legislation, Bill C-36, *the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, also known as the “Nordic” model or approach, targets purchasers of sexual services and third parties who profit from others’ sexual services. Under this legislation, providers of sexual services are not criminalized, but are instead viewed as requiring support and not punishment (Department of Justice Canada 2014). With this important distinction at the forefront of this approach, the Measures Addressing Prostitution Initiative (MAPI) was created to aid sexual service providers to exit the sex trade. This program received multi-year funding from 2015-2016 to 2020-2021.

A major aspect of this initiative was to provide funding to organizations within the not-for-profit sector to support individuals within the sex trade with wrap-around services, such as housing, healthcare, therapy, addictions treatment, family reunification, and life skills programs. The 2022 publication of *A Review of the Measures to Address Prostitution Initiative (MAPI)* (Badets and Wichmann 2022) was based on data collected by the thirteen (13) organizations that provided support services. The data collected included basic demographics, services used, and some outcomes. While the report provides some information on people seeking support from these organizations, there remains a lack of qualitative data about the lives of sexual service providers.

Voice Found was one of the thirteen (13) organizations that received funding from MAPI; and this charity has a mandate to provide services to those who are at risk of, who have been, or who are being trafficked. This includes both sex and labour trafficking, but for the scope of this research, only survivors of sex trafficking were included.

The data collected by Voice Found provides many insights into the lives of their clients at the time of first being trafficked, during trafficking, their experiences as they exited, and what has helped or may have helped them through this time. The intention of this project was to provide a more complete picture of the *why* and *how* of both entering and exiting sex trafficking.

What is human trafficking?

While there may be similarities between consensual sex work and sex trafficking, there is a clear distinction between the two. Human trafficking has three aspects: the act, the means, and the purpose (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.).

A trafficker must engage in the act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, concealing, or receiving a person using one or more of the following means for the purposes of exploitation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d., Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness 2019):

- Threat or use of force
- Coercion
- Fraud
- Deception
- Abuse of a position of vulnerability
- Giving payments or benefits
- Abduction

There are many different types of human trafficking, but for the scope of this research, the focus will be on trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation (heretofore referred to as trafficking).

METHODS

This report is based on twenty-two (22) semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted in 2022 with current and historical clients of Voice Found, as well as two (2) anti-human trafficking professionals with lived experience of trafficking. The research questions were developed by Voice Found's Director of Anti-Human Trafficking, the organization's principal investigator for this research.

This protocol was reviewed by the Research Review Committee at Justice Canada's Research and Statistics Division. After that review, the researchers at Voice Found and representatives of Justice Canada met with Dr. Lorraine Ferris (Ferris Consulting) to discuss ethical considerations for the study. Dr. Ferris has extensive experience in the conduct of research, such as research integrity, ethics and responsible publishing, and regularly gives seminars on these topics. Dr. Ferris reviewed the project proposal, interview guide, ethics protocol and the participant consent form and provided input on ethical considerations for this study. These two processes provided additional measures to ensure the well-being of research participants.

Trauma-Informed Approach

The Director of Anti-Human Trafficking, who provides primary and ongoing support as Voice Found's anti-human trafficking case manager and lived experience peer supporter, chose participants based on readiness, willingness, and ability to discuss details of their trafficking history. The Director used discretion and knowledge of the client base to carefully select participants, such as whether a client is in active addiction, has recently experienced a crisis (whether personal or trafficking related), has been open and willing to discuss their experiences in the past, and whether they are able to maintain a healthy distance between themselves and their experiences so as to not experience re-traumatization. The Director of Anti-Human Trafficking also provided as many accommodations as possible to ensure the safety and stability of these clients throughout this process. For example, there was flexibility in the time of the interview, the means to conduct the interview (whether in-person, over the phone, or via conference call), location of an in-person meeting, and duration of the interview, sometimes breaking the interview process over more than one session to ensure mental and emotional safety. It should be noted that some clients who were invited to participate in this research declined to do so.

Interviewees were invited to participate as subject matter experts and were provided an honorarium for their participation. Any identifying information in the data collected during the interviews has been removed to respect the privacy of clients.

Research Questions

Nine (9) research questions were proposed by the Research and Statistics Division and adapted to the lived experience of survivors of human trafficking to ensure the correct data was being collected (Annex A). The questions include demographic data and correspond with the survivor's timeline from beginning trafficking, during and exiting trafficking, and after exiting trafficking. Also included is a section where survivors were given the opportunity to share additional insights directly to Justice Canada (full testimonies can be found in Annex B).

FINDINGS

Section One: Sample characteristics

Demographic Data

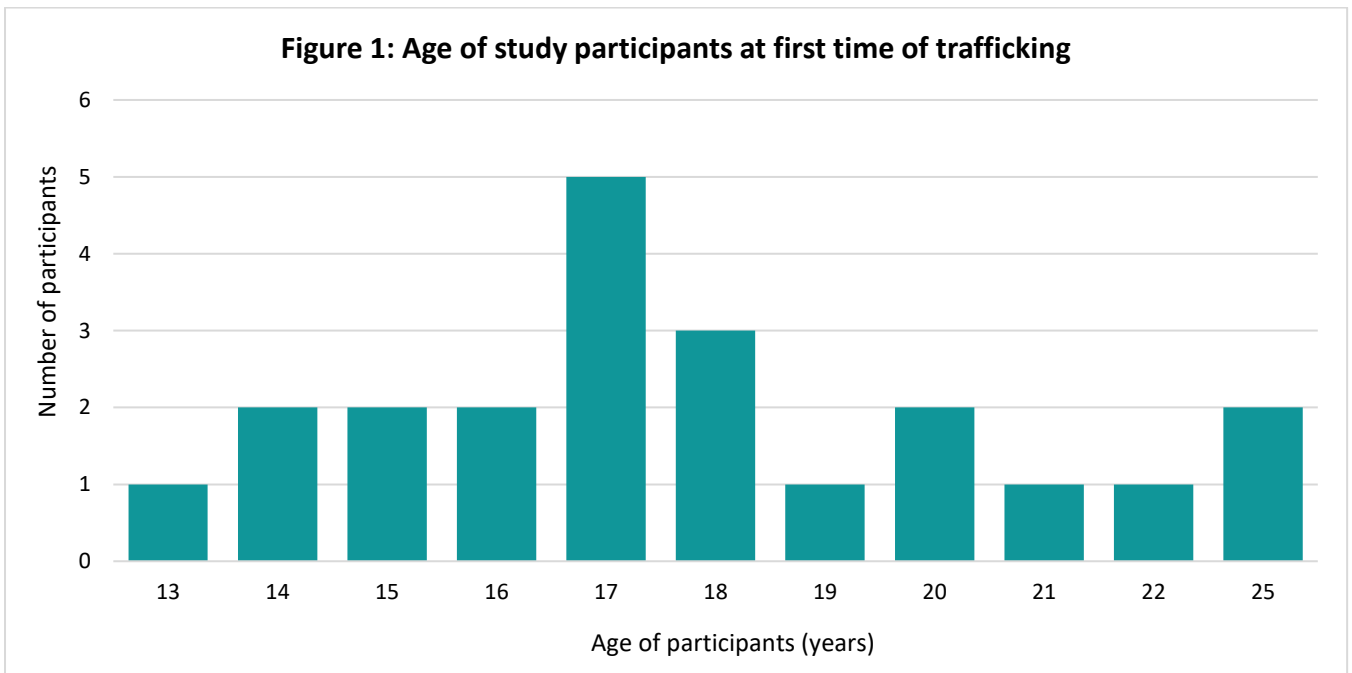
The majority of participants interviewed have received or are receiving support from Voice Found, with two (2) participants working as survivor-advocates within the sector. All of the demographic data collected during this study can be found in Annex C.

Gender, Ethnicity, and Racialized Identity

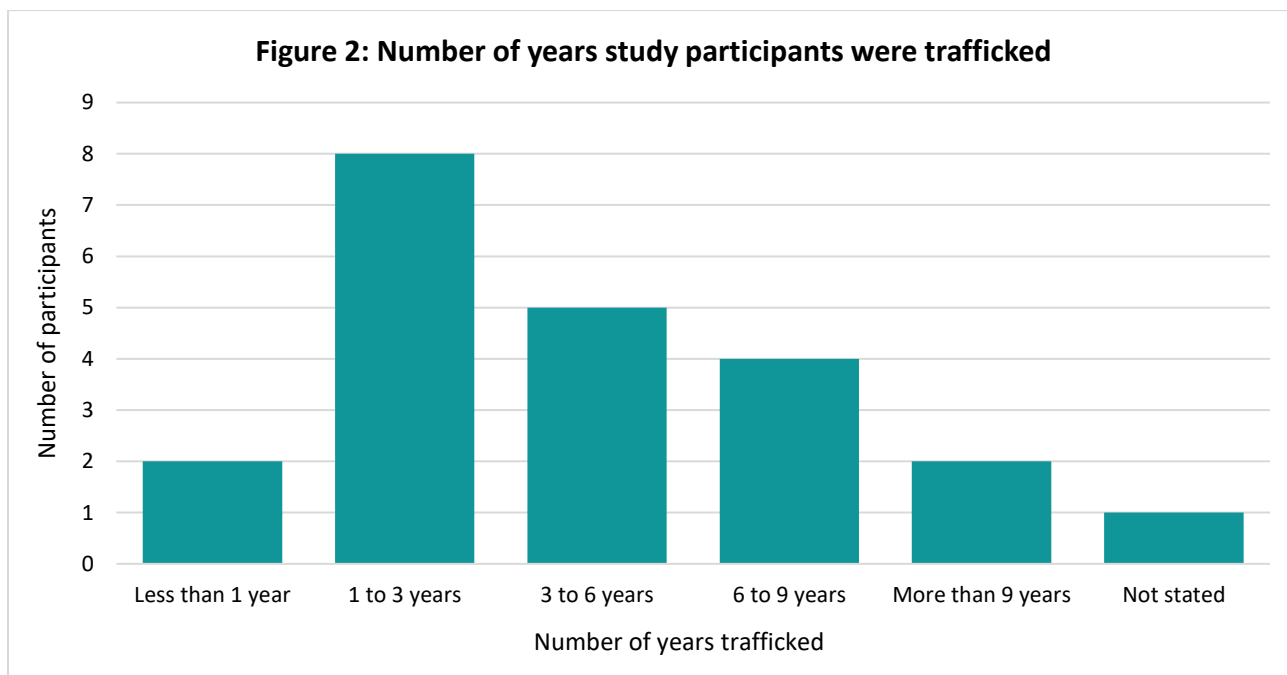
Participants were asked to self-identify using their own preferred language to express their gender, and ethnic and/or racialized identity. Voice Found supports clients of all genders, however men who are trafficked are less likely to come forward seeking support. This research includes twenty-one (21) females and one (1) trans female. Three quarters of the participants identified as white and included the following terms: “French/Croatian”, “French Canadian”, and “Canadian”. The study included six (6) racialized persons, two (2) of whom identified as “white and Indigenous”, and the remaining four (4) identified as Hispanic, Indigenous, Moroccan, or Mongolian.

Trafficking Specific Demographic Data

The age range of participants at the time of trafficking was 13 to 25 years old, and most participants were 17 or 18 years old the first time they were trafficked (Figure 1).



Participants had a number of traffickers, ranging from 1 to 12, with an average of 4 traffickers. The number of years participants were trafficked ranged from 3 months to 14 years, and most participants were trafficked for 1 to 3 years (Figure 2).



The number of times participants were trafficked ranged from 1 to 12 times and most participants had been trafficked about 4 times. The number of times participants attempted to exit trafficking before being successful ranged from none (0) to more than a hundred (100+) attempts. Half of the participants indicated they had “more than five attempts” to exit trafficking.

An equal number of participants did and did not have help to exit trafficking, with eleven (11) indicating they had help and eleven (11) indicating they exited by themselves. Participants have been, or are currently, accessing support between one (1) month and seven (7) years with an average of 3.5 years. One (1) participant did not provide an answer. Participants may or may not have begun receiving support while they were still being trafficked.

Key Findings

The vulnerability of this particular population is highlighted by the fact that the majority of participants were trafficked at young ages and more than once. This suggests that they did not receive support, treatment, or the requisite care to prevent further exploitation nor to heal from the traumas both leading to and during trafficking.

Section Two: Beginning of trafficking

This section provides insight into the lives of survivors at the time they were first trafficked. Participants were asked to describe the nature of their relationship with their trafficker; how they became involved in human trafficking; the positive influences in their life at the time of being trafficked; and the challenges, barriers, and negative influences in their life at the time of being trafficked. It should be noted that some

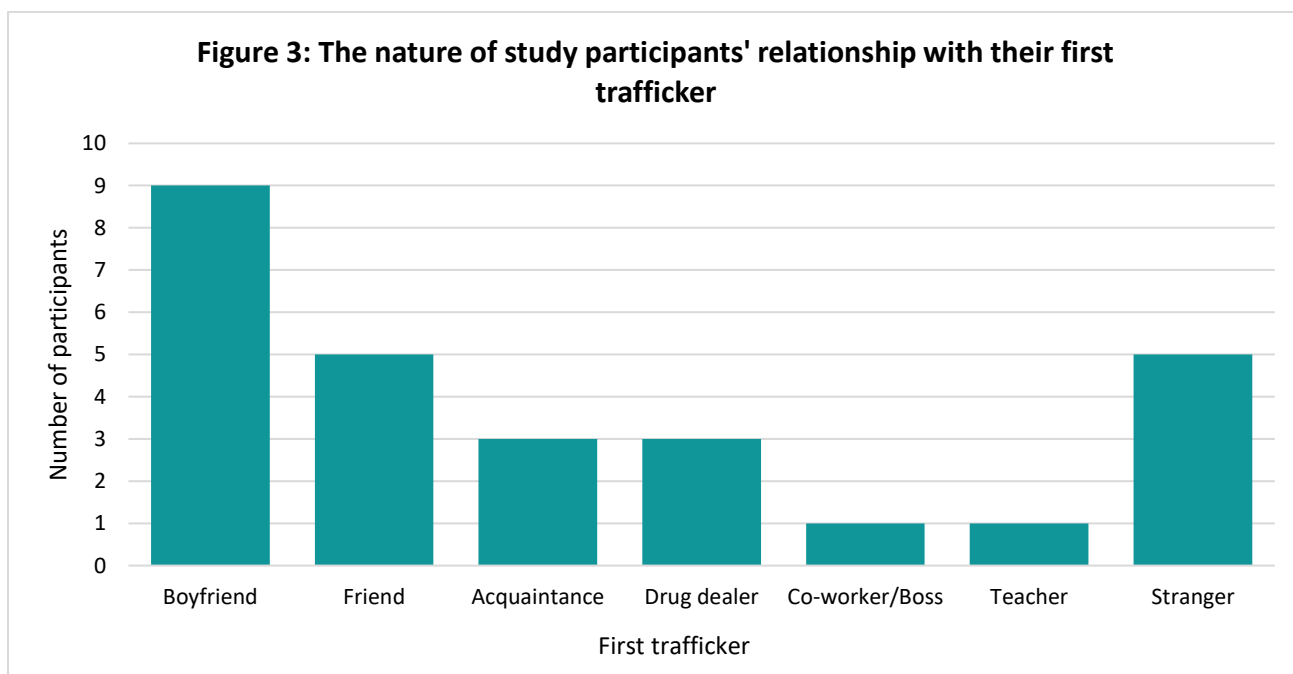
participants who were trafficked more than once described the different relationships with each trafficker, therefore the number of responses is more than twenty-two (22).

Participants provided insights into the uniqueness of each instance of trafficking. No two stories are the same. However, there are many similarities, particularly the vulnerability of these women when they were first trafficked, many as minors, and the manner in which traffickers exploited this vulnerability. Deception and coercion are the most common tactics that traffickers employed to recruit these participants for trafficking.

Many of the participants describe a confluence of challenges, barriers, and negative influences that led to their victimization, with descriptions of an unstable or negative family life at home being the most common risk factor, followed by negative social relationships. However, there are many other factors described by survivors that also appear to originate from an unstable or negative family life.

Nature of relationship with their first trafficker and entry into trafficking

Participants described a variety of different relationships with their traffickers, including boyfriend, friend, acquaintance, drug dealer, and stranger. Despite the differences in the nature of the relationship, most of the traffickers used similar means to induce the participant to enter trafficking: deception and coercion. These survivors spoke of being promised a better life or money and a lavish lifestyle by their boyfriends, friends, drug dealers, acquaintances, or strangers, and how those promises did not come true (Figure 3). A quarter of participants specifically mentioned that their trafficker made promises of this nature only to take all of their money.



The most predominant type of relationship with a trafficker that was identified was “boyfriend”, from just under half of twenty-two (22) respondents. Of these responses, deception and coercion were the primary methods used to lure participants into human trafficking. One (1) participant said that she was struggling with finances and pressures from the Children's Aid Society. A boyfriend, whom she also described as her boss, told her how to make money through sex work and she was shown how to do it through fake

modelling ads. Another participant said that a boyfriend forced her to move to another city and live in a motel to sell sex and blackmailed her by threatening to tell her mother everything.

A quarter of participants described entering into trafficking through a “stranger”. One (1) participant described meeting her trafficker through a contact from her drug dealer whom she thought was a john. Similarly, a participant was working at a strip club at the age of eighteen (18) and was picked up by a stranger. Another participant was living with criminally involved persons at the time and joined a fetish website to try to apply as a live-in sex worker, and was trafficked from there. A participant who was homeless at the time described meeting her trafficker at a shelter who “sweet talked her into a better life,” and another participant described being homeless and being picked up off the street by a stranger.

Another quarter of participants described entering into trafficking through a “friend”. In two (2) of these cases, participants described homelessness as a core cause of their vulnerability to trafficking. The remaining three (3) cases involved being deceived by their trafficker. One (1) participant ran into an old friend who offered to help her make money. Another participant said that her “best friend was working and showed [her] how good life could be with all the money”. Another participant described meeting someone she thought of as a “friend” through a dating app who offered to help her make money “and then took all of it”.

Three (3) participants also described entering into trafficking through a connection to an “acquaintance”. One (1) participant described being introduced by a friend to a couple who used a lot of intimidation on her and manipulated her through “power dynamics” to enter into sex work. Another participant described a friend of her boyfriend whom she referred to as an acquaintance; he took her into debt bondage after her boyfriend was sent to jail. Threats to her own safety and that of her family were made, and thus she was coerced into sex work. A third participant identified that she was deceived by an acquaintance who asked if she wanted to make money, got her involved in sex work, then took all of her earnings.

Three (3) participants also described entering trafficking through a relationship with a “drug dealer”. One (1) participant said “the first time it was my dealer. He just asked me if I wanted to make some money and presented it to me like a good opportunity, but then he took all of my money”. Another participant who was trafficked by a drug dealer describes being homeless and “using a lot of drugs at the time”. A third participant describes her trafficker as her boyfriend who was originally her dealer (this was included in this category and not “boyfriend” because of the specific nature of the original relationship).

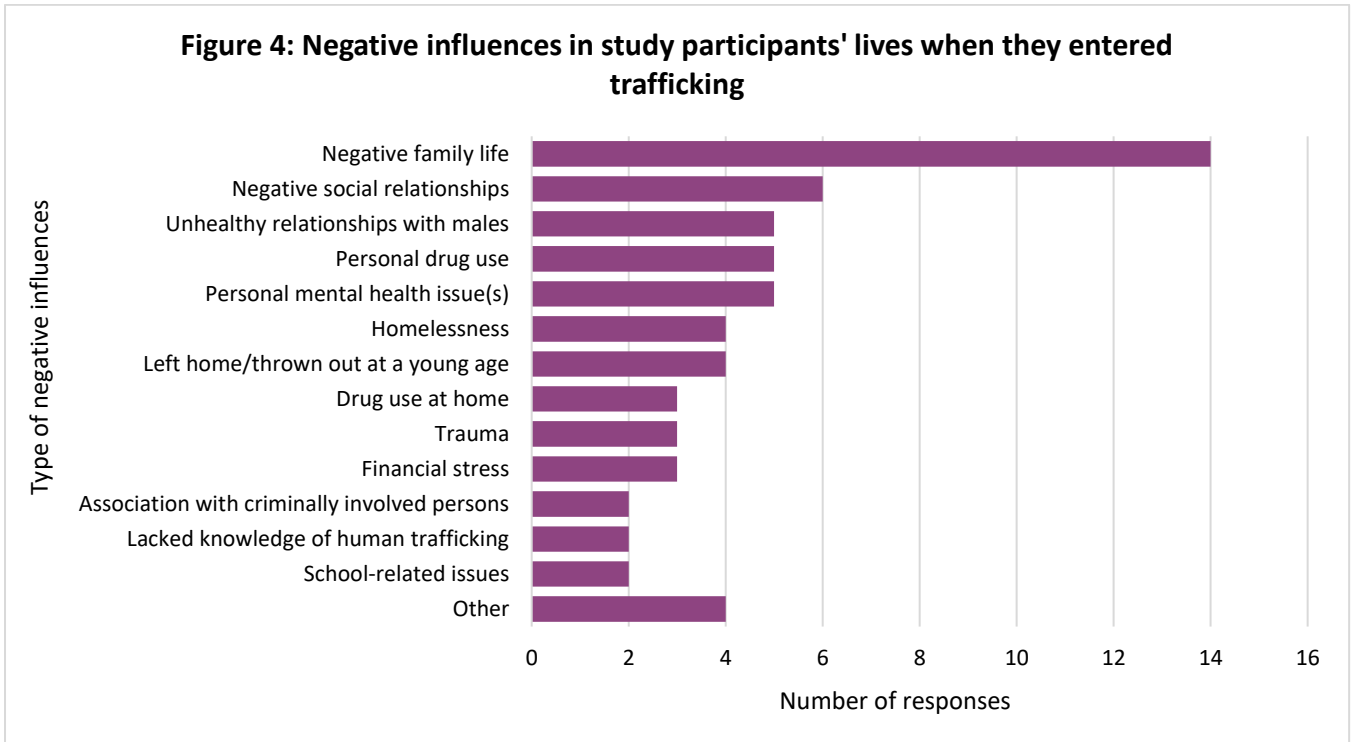
One (1) participant said that she applied to work at a bar while being underage and was trafficked by her boss and co-worker at that establishment. Another participant described her entry into trafficking as beginning “with a junior high school teacher who started abusing [her] for himself and then started sharing [her]”.

Positive influences at time of being trafficked

When asked what positive influences were in their life at the time of entering trafficking, of the twenty-two (22) participants just under half responded with none or no positive influences. One (1) participant reported they had a few positives, and a quarter responded that family was a positive influence when they entered trafficking, of which three (3) mentioned their mother specifically. Sports, school, job, friends, roommate, and Alcoholics Anonymous were also named as positive influences.

Challenges, barriers, and negatives influences at time of being trafficked

Below is a graph that identifies the negative factors influencing participants' lives at the time of entering trafficking. Some participants described multiple factors and therefore responded with more than one circumstance. This section and subsequent sections include data based on the number of responses instead of the number of participants because participants may each have more than one response in each section, therefore responses add to more than the total number of participants (22).



Note: Other includes one response each for the following four (4) negative influences: abusive family home, parent with mental health issue(s), abuse, and personal alcohol abuse.

Of the challenges, barriers, and negative influences in their lives at the time of entering trafficking, over half of participants indicated they had a negative family life (Figure 4). One (1) of these participants described having “no safe home” and “lacking love and affection”. Another mentioned her mom leaving home, and another described an abusive family. Similarly, a participant expressed that she “had no supports as a child. [She] was kicked out of the house and [her] mom wasn’t supportive”. Participants also mentioned having a problem or issue with a specific parent, having “rocky family relationships”, family life being stressful and not wanting to be around them, and being blamed for being bullied and abused. One (1) participant said, “I had no money, no home, and no family relationships”.

Six (6) participants noted negative social relationships⁴ and five (5) participants each mentioned unhealthy relationships with males, personal mental health issue(s), and personal drug use. Two (2) participants indicated gang involvement. Participants mentioned engaging in activities like drug use, partying, “hanging out with the wrong crowd” or “hanging out with bad friends”. One (1) participant said she had a toxic home life, negative peer support, and lacked social support and positive role models. One (1) participant responded that she did not have a father at home and sought a father figure, whom she thought she had found “in a pimp”. Another participant spoke of leaving home at a young age due to strict and rigid rules at

⁴ “Negative social relationships” refers to a) individuals who negatively influenced the participant’s life, whether friends or other social connections beyond their immediate family, such as criminally involved persons, and people who abused substances and b) a lack of supportive social connections as expressed by the participant.

home, and also mentioned that she “dated the bad boys”. A third said she “was seeking attention from males all the time as if that was [her] worth”. Personal mental health issues that were specifically mentioned included “lacking healthy boundaries and understanding right from wrong”, self-harm, and self-blaming.

Four (4) participants noted they experienced homelessness (including couchsurfing) and left home/were thrown out at a young age, and drug use at home and financial stress each received three (3) responses. Three (3) participants also used the term trauma to describe an aspect of their mental and emotional state at the time of entering trafficking. One (1) participant described having experienced childhood trauma. Another participant described sexual abuse that took place before being trafficked. The third participant to use the term trauma provided no further details. One (1) participant described living with a parent with a mental health issue resulting in an unstable home life.

Key findings

The intersection that many participants described between challenging home environments, negative or poor relationships with family, and a lack of positive social support indicates a toxic mix of traumatic experiences and circumstances leading to vulnerability and exploitation. While only fourteen (14) of the participants specifically indicated that a negative family life was a challenge, barrier, or negative influence, there are other indicators, such as negative social relationships, homelessness, personal mental health issues, personal drug use, leaving home/being thrown out at a young age, drug use at home, trauma, and financial stress, that seem to connect back to this particular factor.

Participants painted a picture of their quality of life, mental health and well-being before entering trafficking as one where they experienced desperation, isolation and fear. Traffickers, whether posing as boyfriends, friends, drug dealers, acquaintances, or strangers, exploited these vulnerabilities for their own gain by promising a better life, easy money, and/or a lavish lifestyle and instead, took the earnings of these survivors for themselves.

Section Three: During and exiting trafficking

This section provides insight into the lives of survivors while they were being trafficked up to and including their successful exit. Participants describe from whom they experienced violence; whether they worked with others to provide sexual services and whether this was a choice; whether exiting trafficking was their choice; what supports they were aware of before exiting; when they accessed or tried to access supports (before exiting, at exit, or after exiting), which supports were helpful, which were unhelpful, and which supports would have been helpful but were not available.

The descriptions from survivors of their lives while being trafficked indicate a very dark, frightening, and isolating world for these women. The violence they experienced at the hands of both traffickers and johns paints a life marred with trauma on a regular if not daily basis. Some participants shared that they would work with others to provide sexual services, whereas others spoke of being forced to do so. Luckily, some of these survivors were able to access support while being trafficked however, many participants (10) indicated that they were only able to access support after exiting.

The majority of participants indicated that human trafficking specific and trauma-informed programs and services have been the most helpful upon accessing support; many of them, however, were not aware of these supports while being trafficked. Participants also indicated that a key support that is of short supply and difficult to access is safe and secure housing, not shelters.

Perpetrators of violence

When asked about cases involving violence and who perpetrated the violence, seven (7) participants responded that traffickers were more violent, five (5) responded that the johns were more violent, nine (9) responded that both were violent, and one (1) did not know. The participants who responded that both were violent describe a variety of different experiences of violence at the hands of both traffickers and johns, including one (1) participant who described johns as physically more violent, while traffickers were more mentally violent. Another participant said that while their traffickers were violent, it was predictable and familiar, whereas johns were scarier because they were unpredictable. One participant describes herself as having been “lucky with johns” when it came to violence, as it was mostly traffickers who perpetrated violence toward her. Participants did not discuss any injuries they may have received while being trafficked, nor any subsequent medical care they may have sought as a result of these injuries.

Working with others to provide sexual services

The majority of participants responded that they had worked with someone else to provide sexual services. Half of participants described being forced into working with someone else, while three (3) participants confirmed they had worked with someone else without providing any further context. Two (2) participants responded that they had not worked with someone else, and three (3) participants said that they had made the choice to work with someone else. As one participant said about her choosing to work with others, “it was more fun and safer with friends”. Another participant said that she chose to work with someone else “often to get more money or to impress [her] trafficker”. One (1) participant said that she was both forced to work with others and given the choice to do so. She said that when she made the choice to work with someone else, it was usually out of safety. Participants did not provide any further demographic data about the individuals they worked with, and whether they were also trafficked individuals.

Support to exit and exiting as a choice

Whether these survivors had support to exit trafficking was split with half of participants receiving help to exit, and half of participants receiving no help. One (1) participant identified the circumstances regarding her exit both times she was trafficked, the first time exiting without help and the second time exiting with help. Two (2) participants identified a family member or close relationship as the primary support to exit, five (5) identified being helped by one or more service providers, and four (4) identified being helped by a service provider and an anti-human trafficking police unit. One (1) participant describes an anti-human trafficking police unit checking on her through proactive police outreach while she was being trafficked, but was ultimately freed when her trafficker was arrested.

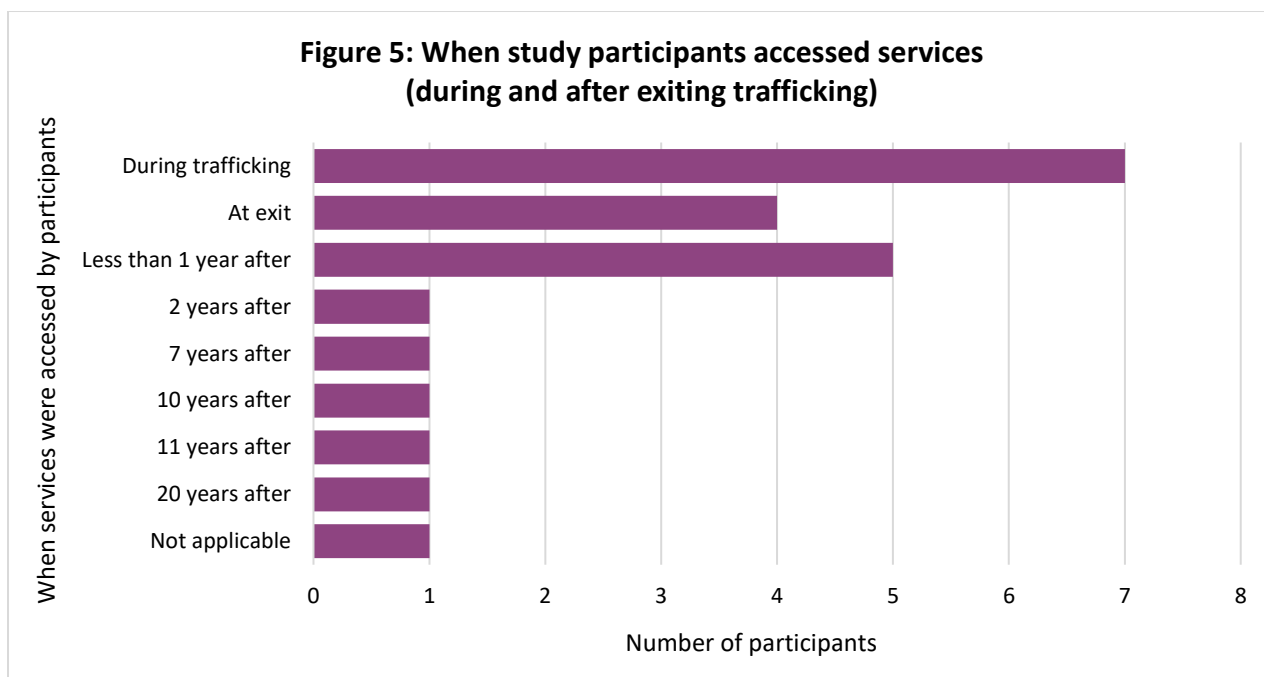
Of the participants who described having no help to exit, two (2) described running away. In the words of one (1) participant “I did it on my own and just kept running”. Another participant described how a social worker at a hospital helped her to make sense of the situation she was in and connected her with a human trafficking support organization. As there were no supports at the time of her exiting over 20 years ago, one (1) participant described having no option for support because there were no human trafficking service providers at the time. However, she was able to call her city and request emergency housing.

The vast majority of participants responded that exiting was their choice. Three (3) of these respondents shared that at the time it did not feel like a choice. One (1) participant shared that “it felt forced at first, but I realized later that it was a choice”. Two (2) participants shared that they did not know whether it was a choice or not, and one (1) participant shared that exiting did not feel like a choice because “there was nowhere else to go”.

Accessing support

When services were accessed

Just under half of the participants accessed support after they had exited trafficking, ranging from a few days after exiting to twenty (20) years after exiting. Seven (7) participants accessed support while being trafficked, and four (4) participants accessed support at the time of their exiting.



Most helpful services

Of these supports accessed, participants indicated that the human trafficking support services and service providers have been the most helpful. Most notably, the lived experience case management and peer support they received was highlighted by four (4) participants, as was therapy in four (4) responses, followed by trauma-informed medical care in three (3) responses. Half of the participants indicated that services had been helpful, but did not indicate which ones nor how they were helpful.

One (1) participant described the best aspects of the services they accessed was the non-judgemental approach. Two (2) participants said that continuous support regardless of time passed since trafficking was most important. One (1) of these participants said she “would have been a junkie or dead without support”. Participants also described various financial supports or opportunities that were helpful, such as access to funding for therapy and tattoo removal. Others spoke of safe and secure housing, access to addictions support and/or treatment, and safety planning as key supports that they have received.

Most unhelpful services

A quarter of participants said that all the support they received was helpful. Others describe a variety of different unhelpful supports largely due to lack of staff with lived experience or understanding of human trafficking. One (1) participant describes attending an addictions treatment centre that included men, allowed clients to relapse, and provided too much freedom, resulting in an unsafe environment in which the participant relapsed. Another participant spoke of a treatment centre that used exposure therapy, asked inappropriate questions of her, and “pushed religion” on her. Two (2) participants said they were provided programming for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, but these programs and support groups did not meet their specific needs. One (1) participant said that she saw a doctor who was not trauma-informed and took her driver’s license away.

Awareness of available services before exiting

The majority of participants described being unaware of any support before exiting, except for common services like shelters, hospitals, sexual health clinics, and police. One (1) participant noted that no human trafficking related services were available at the time of her being trafficked, and another participant described that a barrier for her to seek services was that service providers did not fully understand what had happened to her. Two (2) participants described being aware of anti-human trafficking supports before exiting; they did not provide further context of how they learned about these services. Two (2) participants were aware that the police were available, but spoke about being too afraid to contact them. One (1) of these participants said, “traffickers brainwash their victims to believe that police are bad and not gonna help”. Two (2) participants described learning about available services through their mothers, who had searched for resources on their behalf. Others mentioned being informed by anti-human trafficking police or hospital staff about available resources.

It is also important to note that two (2) participants specifically indicated that they did not know at the time what was happening to them. They were unaware that they were being trafficked and therefore, they were unaware of what supports might have been available.

Supports that were not available but would have been helpful

When asked about what supports would have been helpful, but were not available, the response most frequently provided, by a quarter of participants, was better access to and an increased amount of secure housing. Of these participants, half of them (3) specifically said that shelters are not enough. One (1) of these respondents said that, “coming from high-end hotels and going to shelters with drug users was really tough”. Another participant suggested safe housing that provided a balance of freedom and support would have been helpful. A third participant said: “We need more human trafficking housing and to be able to get it faster for safety. There’s just not enough good, safe housing when people exit”.

Access to therapy was also a key support that was missing for four (4) of the participants. Three (3) participants specifically mentioned the need for more staff with human trafficking lived experience, programming (such as second stage skill building, increasing self-esteem and confidence, discussion groups, yoga, and meditation), and access to amenities (such as gym memberships or places to learn and cultivate hobbies). Other important aspects of support that were missing at the time for several participants were funding for post-secondary education and having no end date or timeline for government funding. Others mentioned a universal basic income, tattoo removal, trauma-informed health care, and financial support for debt incurred while being trafficked. Two (2) participants mentioned court-related issues, as they wanted to avoid a court process that involved being face-to-face with their trafficker, and seeking full protection from traffickers even after the court process.

Key findings

Participants highlighted the lack of safety and agency that exists within the world of trafficking. Research is currently being funded, albeit at a slow pace, to study the brains of women who have been victims of domestic abuse, stating that “researchers estimate that approximately one in eight Canadian women are likely suffering from an unrecognized brain injury related to domestic violence” (Hayes 2022). While trafficking is vastly different from domestic violence, and this figure does not include violence perpetrated by traffickers, this research highlights the lack of insights we currently have into the short and long-term effects that this violence may have on trafficking victims and survivors.

Seeking support from police, aside from the specific anti-human trafficking units, while being trafficked did not appear to be an option for many participants as they were afraid of the possible negative consequences of reaching out for help from both their trafficker and from law enforcement.

Section Four: After exiting trafficking

In this section, participants describe their lives after having successfully exited trafficking. Participants provided insight into the current positive influences and challenges, barriers, and negative influences in their lives; the most helpful support and/or resources since exiting; whether they provided any consensual sexual services after exiting; and whether they are still involved in consensual sex work and whether it is something they want to do or is circumstantial.

Participants spoke in detail about their life since exiting trafficking and described a nexus of challenges, barriers, and negative influences that continue to significantly impact their day-to-day lives. Central to many survivors' lives is the struggle to make ends meet financially. Many are receiving government assistance and speak about how this income is too little to live on, while describing the challenges of trying to support themselves through work that is not sex work.

Current positive influences

The majority of participants said that family is a current positive influence in their lives, with half of these participants specifically mentioning their mother. Friends and/or healthy social relationships and human trafficking specific supports were both identified by just under half of participants. Kids were mentioned by over a quarter of participants, as were pets, therapy, and lived experience human trafficking support. School or post-secondary education, stable housing, and addictions support or treatment were all mentioned three (3) times, and four (4) participants identified a job as a current positive influence. Two (2) participants described their “self” as a positive influence, and one (1) participant described a debt recovery program as an essential positive influence.

Current and most significant challenges, barriers, and negative influences

The most common and significant challenge that participants described were mental health issues. Participants described being scared to be alone, lacking self-worth and self-esteem, lacking confidence, ongoing anxiety, living with shame, paranoia and trust issues, suffering from imposter syndrome⁵, feeling like an outcast, and boundary issues. Developing healthy friendships/relationships and finances were also common challenges, and these factors appeared frequently amongst participants' descriptions of the most significant challenges they have faced since exiting. Trauma was a current challenge described by just under half of participants who described suffering from flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, and trouble sleeping. Four

⁵ Imposter syndrome is a persistent experience of self-doubt or inability to accept one's achievements and is often characterized by feelings of anxiety or depression.

(4) participants specifically mentioned living with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)⁶. The participant who identified as trans indicated that “being trans is a huge barrier” because she “is often looked down upon” for who she is. Isolation was mentioned by three (3) participants, and “living the straight life” was described by two (2) participants as being a current challenge.

Other significant challenges, barriers and negative influences that participants are experiencing include withdrawal from drugs, boredom, lack of safe housing, and lack of access to education. Four (4) participants mentioned various struggles arising from adjusting to “the straight life”. One (1) participant said, “even talking to people in the straight world has been a struggle”.

Over a quarter of participants mentioned that they have thought about or are considering getting back into sex work because of the money that can be made. One participant said:

Government support from the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works versus money from sex work is hard to come to terms with because there is such a big difference financially. If you do sex work independently you'll get way more money.

Another participant said that it is difficult “finding jobs with better hourly wages compared to sex work”. She said she is trying to make money, but cannot make enough: “The temptation of big money from sex work, even though you didn’t get to keep your money, you saw how much money it was possible to make”.

A third participant said, “at this point it feels like there's no other option but to go back into the sex trade independently”. Other participants mentioned the struggle of going from dancing or stripping to regular work and the difficulty of finding work that is not sex work.

Most helpful supports since exiting

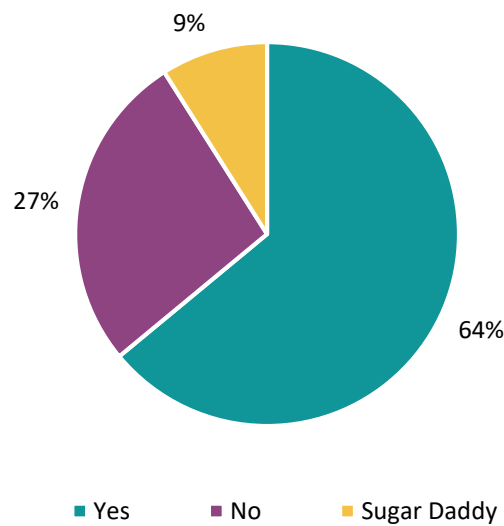
The most helpful support for participants since they exited trafficking is the lived experience support they have received. Second to this are therapy and human trafficking specific services and programs each with five (5) responses. Three (3) participants mentioned safe houses and/or treatment programs specifically for human trafficking survivors, as well as access to funding for therapy. Two participants noted the importance of mental health support and trauma-informed medical care. Other participants mentioned supportive housing, access to private addictions treatment or addictions treatment itself, debt recovery for human trafficking survivors, education counselling, second stage programming, and continued access to support without a time limit.

Consensual and circumstantial sex work after exiting

The majority of participants indicated that they had provided consensual sexual services after exiting trafficking (Figure 6). Those that provided further context said that they did so “a couple of times”, “once”, “4-5 months after exiting”, “once or twice”, “at times I did”, and “to survive on and off”. Over a quarter of participants said that they did not provide consensual sexual services after exiting trafficking. Two (2) participants said that they had or currently have “sugar daddies”, which can be considered as partially involved in sex work as the nature of this relationship differs from the direct provision of sexual services to a john.

⁶ “Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a natural emotional response to frightening or dangerous experiences that involve actual or threatened serious harm to oneself or others. However, for some people, the thoughts or memories of these events seriously affect their lives, long after any real danger has passed. These types of experiences are called “traumatic” (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health n.d.).

Figure 6: Percentage of study participants who provided consensual sexual services after exiting trafficking



When asked whether they are still involved in sex work and whether this is something that they want to continue to do, whether circumstantially to make ends meet or as a chosen occupation, the majority of participants responded “no”. Among these participants who responded “no”, one (1) added that sex work is still “in the back of [her] mind as an option”. Of those who did not respond “no”, one (1) participant responded that she is “thinking about starting again”, and one (1) other participant responded that she still provided consensual sexual services “sometimes”. One (1) participant indicated that she currently has a sugar daddy.

Key findings

The non-judgmental, trauma-informed, and deeply empathetic approach that individuals with personal experience of human trafficking take to support others like them was noted as an essential part of the healing journey for participants. The opportunity that such safety affords these individuals has the power to help transform them from victims to survivors. However, this is a long and winding healing journey for them.

It may be difficult to understand why survivors may wish to re-enter sex work despite their history with it; however, this behaviour is consistent with this population because of the trauma of their trafficking experiences. The familiarity of the work, however difficult, along with their lack of stability to engage in new and healthier activities, and the desire to meet an immediate financial need all create the conditions for re-entering sex work.

Section Five: From survivors

Participants were asked an open-ended question on whether there was any additional information they wished to share, and what they would like to tell politicians and bureaucrats about their experiences. This section looks at the key takeaways from the responses and highlights the most common and most relevant responses expressed by survivors (for full responses, please see Annex B).

Many participants indicated, based on their lived experience, that they have not seen enough education and awareness about human trafficking, particularly for youth and especially for at-risk youth. Prevention of trafficking was also mentioned when discussing the support of youth, as described by a participant:

We need to prevent human trafficking by educating kids and youth, especially at-risk children and youth. Sex workers/trafficking victims and survivors have a lot to give back, we are more than what happened to us. I was a junkie and on the streets and look at me now. I felt ignored and forgotten and less than. I got sober and got the help and support I needed and have so much to offer society.

Several participants noted that human trafficking is more prevalent than we think and involves people of different races, religions, cultures, and statuses, regardless of whether they are a victim, trafficker, or john. This prevalence makes prevention a key aspect of public safety. One (1) participant said, based on her own experiences:

It could be your child. People don't speak about it enough. Women are scared. It could be your auntie or somebody as young as 12. We need more resources to help these girls.

Another participant said:

Human trafficking needs to be taught more because a lot of the times the game is glorified and people need to know what it's really like.

A third participant said:

I wish they knew how it actually is in person. It's not like in the movies when someone is trafficked. There needs to be more understanding about the long-term trauma that happens because of this.

Many participants expressed the need for more support for victims and survivors and more awareness of these supports for needs such as funding, safe housing, furniture, basic necessities, victim safety, and promoting well-being. One (1) participant said:

There needs to be more funding for victims of human trafficking. We made a lot of money and then it was taken [by traffickers]. It's like we worked for nothing. Even my Canada Emergency Response Benefit was taken from me. We should be able to prove this in court and get our money back.

Another participant said:

If we [people who have been trafficked] had resources it would be easier to start our own business. I would be better off. I would've been able to use my transferable skills from my trauma to make money for myself legally. It took me to hit rock bottom to appreciate life. You could always be something worse. I'm not afraid to struggle, I know there's always a way out now.

Government financial support, particularly provincial programs, does not provide a liveable income and is too difficult to access, creating an additional barrier for survivors to even meet their basic needs. The lack of security and instability that arises from such precariousness only compounds the challenges they face in trying to gain control of their lives. One (1) participant said, based on her experiences that:

It feels like the government is just waiting for people to die so that you can pay them less. You shouldn't have conditions to be able to get assistance.

Another participant said:

I wish they understood it's not always our fault. The situation is forced onto us. A lot of the time this happens when there's nowhere to go and no housing for us.

Another participant said that “trafficked people need faster supports, especially financially. Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is not a living wage”. A third participant, who also received social assistance, expressed:

I would like [politicians and bureaucrats] to know that they should try living on welfare for a bit. They're essentially leaving us to die. They're trying to make us comply to get a small cheque that's not even liveable. They constantly make you have to do things to get the support. It's impossible. Politicians haven't lost everything like we have. They are actually closer to us than they think.

Survivors are often placed in the difficult position of having to support themselves financially with government programs that do not provide adequate funding, often take time to access, and impose constraints that do not consider the specific needs of this population. This only increases the likelihood that survivors will re-enter sex work and be re-exploited. As one participant said:

While I was extremely lucky to have been able to access them [support services], I never even knew that there was help out there that wasn't police. [...] The more secure someone exiting trafficking feels the less likely they are to end up back in the hands of a pimp to put clothes on their back and food in their stomachs. There's not enough discourse on how survivors choose to survive either, be it falling into or back into addiction, the extreme mental health issues, eating disorders, committing crimes in order to survive (ie. theft). Survivors feel the need to regain control in non progressive ways and either end up not being able to get that help due to lack of funds to do so or having to get basic care from a mental health institution, where they are put on a months long waitlist and then their help is not trauma-informed.

Further to this, the participant added:

I've personally witnessed a friend overdose within the past year. We were actually rescued on the same day in different cities. She had tried to receive help for mental health that led to addiction and was put on a waitlist and died waiting. She was absolutely not the only survivor to die in the process of trying to figure out how to live after being trafficked because she couldn't afford to go to a privatized health care facility and all attempts to get ODSP funded care failed. [...] how is it that someone can survive a horrid trauma just for the aftermath of survival to kill them because they can't access help.

Adding to this lack of safety and instability, as described by participants, is that traffickers are not justly punished for their crimes. One (1) participant highlighted the impact this can have on survivors:

I've seen with my own experience and also others, how our traffickers serve little to no time. Whatever the reason may be for early releases for them, the effect it has on their victims is unimaginable. To know that whoever made the decision that they deserved to be released early did not value the survivor's safety or wellbeing, nor the general public's.

Front-line workers, such as police, health care workers, and those involved in the court system from judges to parole officers, need to be properly trained to understand human trafficking and its impact upon victims. One (1) participant says that:

Police and medical professionals need more sensitivity training and education on human trafficking. Police saw me a lot with bruises after being beaten up and no one helped me.

Another participant said:

You never really understand the full depth of human trafficking unless you've gone through it. It's happening everywhere around you. We walk around with so much shame and guilt and a lot of the time society adds to that shame. It's great that you're starting to recognize the impact of human trafficking, but you need to continue to support victims and as well, support the young people that are becoming traffickers.

Participants have highlighted the significant positive influence that trauma-informed care and lived experience support has in their lives, and they wish to see the same degree of empathy and concern exhibited whenever they interact with law enforcement, the justice system, and service providers. One (1) participant said:

I wish they knew that we needed the appropriate help to heal completely. Helping people is great, but we also need prevention in society as well. We need to help people become members of society. People that end up here usually have some kind of history and we need to address the root causes.

Within this open-ended question, participants provided insight into a broad range of topics, but predominantly spoke about the importance of increasing public awareness and prevention of human trafficking. Participants also spoke of the need for increased support for survivors, particularly financial support, and the need to protect and support sex workers.

DISCUSSION

The survivors who participated in this research have provided comprehensive insights into their lives before, during, and after trafficking. Each of their stories is unique and highlights that no two experiences of trafficking are the same. There are, however, similarities in the quality of life or the personal challenges that participants experienced at the time they were trafficked, the current challenges they face, and the supports that have helped and continue to help them the most.

Minors are most at risk of being trafficked

Of the twenty-two (22) survivors who took part in this research, the majority were first trafficked between the ages of thirteen (13) and eighteen (18). Participants describe a variety of different relationships with their traffickers and situations in which they entered trafficking within this particular age range. One (1) participant revealed that she was thirteen (13) when she left home due to an abusive family and needed money to support herself. Another participant describes being abused by a junior high school teacher at the age of sixteen (16) who then shared her with others. A participant who was fourteen (14) at the time of being trafficked said that her friend had been trafficked and her boyfriend introduced her to trafficking.

Traffickers exploit the vulnerability of minors, especially those who do not have the requisite support through family or other social connections. During their interviews, participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of supporting youth, and especially those who are at-risk, through education that is both awareness and prevention based because they have themselves been these at-risk youth. They fell through the cracks and want to prevent it from happening again.

There is no one cause for trafficking to occur, but an unstable or negative family life is a common factor

Over half of participants specifically mentioned some aspect of a negative home life when asked about the challenges, barriers, and negative influences they were experiencing at the time they were first trafficked. However, the responses of participants indicate that this number is likely much higher. While participants did not all specifically refer to an unstable or negative home life, they did respond with factors such as homelessness, negative social relationships, personal mental health issues, personal drug use, leaving home or being thrown out at a young age, drug use at home, trauma, and living with a parent who has mental health issues.

All of these factors, when looked at more closely, indicate that their home life was not a nourishing and safe environment within which to develop into a regulated and healthy individual. Mental health issues and drug use at a young age alone demonstrate the use of adaptive coping strategies in order to emotionally self-regulate. Homelessness and leaving home or being thrown out at a young age are also clear cases that something was not right at home.

Growing up in a household with drug use at home, for example, indicates that the parents or guardians of that individual were themselves unable to properly regulate negative emotions resulting in a persistent negative emotional state (Maté 2018). This environment will very likely lead to the emotional dysregulation of the child as well because children are dependent upon adults to help them develop effective strategies for self regulation in the early years of their development, both biologically and socially, in order to function healthily as adults. The same is true for children living with a parent who has mental health issues: the child's biological and social need to access an emotionally mature and regulated adult for healthy brain development is not met.

Fundamentally, the factors that participants identified as making them vulnerable to trafficking, such as a negative home life, are circumstances that likely led to early childhood trauma. Some participants used this term when answering the question about the challenges, barriers, and negative influences they experienced at the time of being trafficked. Participants described very stressful and chaotic circumstances in their childhoods that often lacked the necessary warmth and stability that a child needs to grow up mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy. The effects of continuous exposure to an unsupportive and unhealthy environment as a child is trauma (Maté 2003; van der Kolk 2014), which can express itself through risky behaviour, self-harm, poor judgement, and a hampered ability to healthfully and meaningfully connect with others.

Lived experience and trauma-informed care are key supports for survivors of human trafficking

Survivors repeated throughout this study that the best care they received was from trauma-informed staff and particularly staff with lived experience of human trafficking. Participants also spoke of being lumped into programs or services, such as domestic violence support groups, where they did not fit in, nor see themselves reflected in the program.

Empathy and non-judgment are essential parts of healing. Participants spoke of feeling isolation, shame, and having imposter syndrome. Receiving support from someone who has experienced similar trauma provides a depth of understanding that enables survivors to feel as though they can finally be themselves without judgment. The power of receiving non-judgemental support can be transformational as the survivor is given a safe and secure environment and a healthy and supportive relationship is exemplified. The lived experience staff member acts as a role model who is inspiring and insightful for the survivor. Therefore, the relationship itself becomes therapeutic.

Financial stress is a significant pressure in the lives of survivors after exiting trafficking, which may lead to re-entering sex work and possible re-exploitation

While participants may have successfully escaped trafficking, their lives continue to be marred by the trauma of such experiences. The most common and significant challenges that participants are currently facing are mental health issues, healthy friendships/relationships, finances, and processing or reliving trauma. This nexus of compounding factors creates an environment that negatively influences survivors.

Many participants spoke of challenging childhoods that likely led to a hampered ability to emotionally regulate since there were no positive influences at home or otherwise to support such development. The trauma related to trafficking only further undermines this ability, increasing the likelihood of substance abuse, risky behaviour, and further instability. Developing healthy relationships and establishing healthy connections in the “straight world” is therefore also less likely, further undermining their ability to support themselves emotionally and financially, and to survive within the “straight world”. Some participants also spoke of the struggles they endure managing symptoms of trauma, such as PTSD, flashbacks, nightmares, trouble sleeping, and ongoing anxiety. These factors only add to the already seemingly insurmountable challenges that many of these women face.

The majority of participants have expressed that finances or difficulty accessing stable work as a major significant challenge or barrier. The complex issues that these women face and the struggle to support themselves without financial support continue to put them at risk of exploitation. The majority of participants indicated that they had engaged in consensual sex work after exiting and described this work as temporary and intermittent, and at times due to their circumstances such as mounting financial pressures.

CONCLUSION

This particular population has experienced, and continues to experience, a high degree of vulnerability when compared to the general population. The likelihood of early childhood trauma due to unstable home environments led to a high degree of vulnerability at a young age, which traffickers exploited for their own gain. The subsequent trauma of the experience of being trafficked has only added to this vulnerability.

Since exiting, participants continue to live in the shadow of their experience of being trafficked, living with the consequences of a young life disrupted by sexual exploitation. Many do not have the requisite skill set, whether professional or interpersonal, to adjust to employment that does not include dancing, stripping, and/or sex work. Some spoke of having large gaps in employment on their résumé. One (1) participant spoke of not finishing high school due to being trafficked so young, and most spoke of the significant mental and emotional struggle of adjusting to “the straight life”.

While these women continue to access support, there are many victims of trafficking that will not get the same opportunities. The participants spoke of the necessity of increasing public awareness of human trafficking and implementing prevention programs, particularly for at-risk youth in order to prevent further victims of trafficking. These women have described this very dark aspect of our world in great detail, further urging action to end sex trafficking.

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ANNEX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section One: Sample characteristics

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- How many traffickers did you have?
- How many times were you trafficked?
- What was your age at the time of first being trafficked?
- How long did trafficking last before you successfully exited?
- How many times did you attempt to exit before successfully exiting?
- How old were you when you first began accessing support?
- How many years did you or have you been accessing support?

Section Two: Beginning of trafficking

- How did you become involved in human trafficking?
- What was the nature of your relationship with your trafficker?
- What were the positive influences in your life during that time?
- What were the challenges/barriers/negative influences in your life?

Section Three: During and exiting trafficking

- In cases involving violence, who perpetrated the violence?
- Did you ever work together with others providing sexual services? Was it a choice and, if so, why?
- Did you exit with support or own your own?
- Do you feel that exiting was your choice?
- What supports were you aware of before exiting?
- At what point in your life did you access or try to access these supports (for example, before exiting, when exiting, or after)? If after, how long after?
- Were the supports that you accessed helpful?
- What supports did you find were not helpful?
- What supports would you have found helpful that were not available?

Section Four: After exiting trafficking

- What are the current positive influences in your life?
- What are the current challenges/barriers/ negative influences in your life?
- Since exiting, what are the most significant challenges you face?
- What have been the most helpful support and/or resources since exiting?
- Did you provide any consensual sexual services after exiting?
- Are you still involved in consensual sex work? Is this something you want to still do?

Section Five: From survivors

- Is there anything you would like to ask me (the interviewer), or is there other information that you would like to share?
- What would you tell the politicians/the bureaucrats about your experience

ANNEX B: FROM SURVIVORS

Survivors were asked by the interviewer whether there was any further information that they would like to share. The following are their answers:

- “Not enough outreach in strip clubs, in fact there’s no outreach being done. People may take support if they knew it was there.” - Participant #1
- “Punishment of all traffickers should be more severe and longer sentences.” - Participant #6
- “I never felt worthy of anything. It feels like the government is just waiting for people to die so that you can pay them less. You shouldn’t have conditions to be able to get assistance.” - Participant #7
- “I want to see lived experience experts more often.” - Participant #12
- “Human trafficking needs to be taught more because a lot of the times the game is glorified and people need to know what it's really like.” - Participant #13
- “I would like to see more from our federal government. They announced that there would be a lived experience round table and we have yet to see that be rolled out.” - Participant #21

Survivors were also provided the opportunity to tell politicians/bureaucrats about their experience and these are the answers they provided:

- “We need to prevent human trafficking by educating kids and youth, especially at-risk children and youth. Sex workers/trafficking victims and survivors have a lot to give back, we are more than what happened to us. I was a junkie and on the streets and look at me now. I felt ignored and forgotten and less than. I got sober and got the help and support I needed and have so much to offer society. Police and medical professionals need more sensitivity training and education on human trafficking. Police saw me a lot with bruises after being beaten up and no one helped me. Police could’ve helped me. At-risk kids and teenagers need support right away to prevent this. Young girls also need positive male role models. Kids are falling through the crack, there shouldn’t be any cracks. Underage girls are stripping, but no one is interfering, no one is helping. We need more resources and less waiting time for treatments, more resources for heavy substance users. Stop cutting services. We help in other countries, but what about the people here? No one here should be hungry or on the streets.” - Participant #1
- “What the laws are now are good. I want people to be able to do sex work if they want to. I never want it to be legal to traffick people. I just want victims and survivors to be safe and supported. I feel like not a lot of people know how extreme human trafficking is and how discreet it is. It’s happening right in front of you. Trafficked people need faster supports, especially financially. Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is not a living wage. Supports are great, but there needs to be more funding. Where is all the money you hear about in the news? I’m thankful for what I have, but it’s not easy, especially after seeing all the money from the game. Being trafficked really causes so much trauma and it’s a long road to recovery. There’s too many barriers to receive support like OW and ODSP and other financial supports. There’s also a stigma when you’re on OW/ODSP. We’re just trying to get by. If we don’t have proper supports financially, that can lead to us being re-exploited to make our ends meet.” - Participant #2
- “Overall, anything regarding sexual violence survivors and victims safety, well-being, and survival is not nearly looked at enough in terms of government funding. I remember reading one article when the Prime Minister cut federal funds for trafficking support and feeling nauseous. For such a matter which needs more attention and more help for it to be receiving less was disheartening. Basic necessities and such for simple survival, I feel as though these things should be federally funded to not take away from other expenses that come up for social workers helping their clients. Doug Ford took away victim compensation. Had I been able to receive that after being left with nothing, I would

have been able to get a head start on finding my own housing, schooling, and being off of the financial support of ODSP a lot sooner.

- I believe that there needs to be more education on trafficking for authority. Judges, crowns, lawyers, police, parole boards, anyone who has any say in these matters should be properly educated, preferable by survivors themselves. I've seen with my own experience and also others, how our traffickers serve little to no time. Whatever the reason may be for early releases for them, the effect it has on their victims is unimaginable. To know that whoever made the decision that they deserved to be released early did not value the survivor's safety or wellbeing, nor the general public's. People that have the capacity to traffic another person are not rehabilitated after a year or so. They will get out, reoffend, and go back in a vicious cycle because they aren't experiencing consequences to their actions, nor are they the type of people that are rehabilitable. If you can traffic a person, you have absolutely no regard for human life nor safety, and, statistically, will reoffend. I want to believe that has something to do with lack of education in those that are making these decisions, rather than lack of care for the general public and their victims.

While I do know that as of last year there were changes made in Ontario to support survivors, I still don't feel as though it's enough. Maybe I never will believe it's enough, but with Ontario being one of the main hubs for human trafficking in Canada, I believe that there could be so much more done. Our social workers need support in supporting victims and survivors. Survivors need to know that they aren't just another court case to win and that their lives matter more than winning a case matters. None of the statistics you can find on trafficking are accurate, for every survivor there's three victims that will never come forward or will never be heard from again.

- There needs to be more awareness of the access to help for victims. While I was extremely lucky to have been able to access them, I never even knew that there was help out there that wasn't police. Had I only called the police, ultimately that could have put my life in more danger, and that's the reality for victims. Hotels, bars, banks, group homes, anywhere where a trafficker and a victim may be, they need to have proper training in how to identify a potential trafficking situation. Things like providing basic necessities for victims exiting should be government funded, be it clothes, food, furniture, safe housing, anything to help a victim not only be safe but feel safe. The more secure someone exiting trafficking feels the less likely they are to end up back in the hands of a pimp to put clothes on their back and food in their stomachs. There's not enough discourse on how survivors choose to survive either, be it falling into or back into addiction, the extreme mental health issues, eating disorders, committing crimes in order to survive (ie. theft). Survivors feel the need to regain control in non progressive ways and either end up not being able to get that help due to lack of funds to do so or having to get basic care from a mental health institution, where they are put on a months long waitlist and then their help is not trauma-informed. Privatized care with trauma informed specialists should be funded. I've personally witnessed a friend overdose within the past year. We were actually rescued on the same day in different cities. She had tried to receive help for mental health that led to addiction and was put on a waitlist and died waiting. She was absolutely not the only survivor to die in the process of trying to figure out how to live after being trafficked because she couldn't afford to go to a privatized health care facility and all attempts to get ODSP funded care failed. There needs to be better access to these things for survivors, how is it that someone can survive a horrid trauma just for the aftermath of survival to kill them because they can't access help." - Participant #3
- "This world is scary. There's so much stigma and you're supposed to be normal, but there's actually no normal. Regardless of race, religion, culture, status, trafficking is all over the place. It's not just poverty. Status doesn't matter regardless of if you're a victim or a perpetrator. The buyers of sex are also all different types of people. If we had resources it would be easier to start our own business. I would be better off. I would've been able to use my transferable skills from my trauma to make

money for myself legally. It took me to hit rock bottom to appreciate life. You could always be something worse. I'm not afraid to struggle, I know there's always a way out now. Some people don't have support and some people do. All types of people are trafficked, the money is very addictive." - Participant #4

- "Selling sex should be legal. It should be illegal to traffic people. There needs to be protection for sex workers in the sex trade. That protection should not be from a pimp. The government should not be pimping sex workers either. There needs to be more funding for victims of human trafficking. We made a lot of money and then it was taken. It's like we worked for nothing. Even my Canada Emergency Response Benefit was taken from me. We should be able to prove this in court and get our money back." - Participant #5
- "Human trafficking needs to be looked at in a more human way, not just from behind a desk. You need to keep sex workers safe. Outlying doesn't mean it doesn't exist" - Participant #6
- "I would like them to know that they should try living on welfare for a bit. They're essentially leaving us to die. They're trying to make us comply to get a small cheque that's not even liveable. They constantly make you have to do things to get the support. It's impossible. Politicians haven't lost everything like we have. They are actually closer to us than they think". - Participant #7
- "What I went through doesn't define me and I will see you on the podium soon." - Participant #8
- "We need to help the rough around the edges types more often, not just the cookie cutter youth. We need to look at what's being forced on youth and look at the person as a whole. When it comes to sexual trauma, when you exit, things aren't just peachy. All of it is just a mess." - Participant #9
- "People shouldn't be put through this. They get manipulated and don't even know it's happening." - Participant #10
- "It could be your child. People don't speak about it enough. Women are scared. It could be your auntie or somebody as young as 12. We need more resources to help these girls". - Participant #11
- "You need to focus less on the money and more on the girls and what they are going through. The government shouldn't be making money off sex work. You need to put more safety and security and hotels should do background checks for safety. You need to have supports for all over the world". - Participant #13
- "I wish they knew how it actually is in person. It's not like in the movies when someone is trafficked. There needs to be more understanding about the long-term trauma that happens because of this." - Participant #14
- "I wish they knew that we needed the appropriate help to heal completely. Helping people is great, but we also need prevention in society as well. We need to help people become members of society. People that end up here usually have some kind of history and we need to address the root causes". - Participant #15
- "It's everywhere. There's a lot of people to save. There should be permanent funding for anti-human trafficking organizations to be able to help all the others. If I could, I would do the work myself." - Participant #16
- "I wish they understood it's not always our fault. The situation is forced onto us. A lot of the time this happens when there's nowhere to go and no housing for us." - Participant #17
- "16 to 25 year olds need more support. It should almost be automatic versus them having to seek it out. A lot of the time it's really hard to reach out for help, so it would be good if it's automatic". - Participant #18
- "I believe that we need to have more support in schools for youth. It's important for youth to have awareness and education around human trafficking and mental health. It's also good to be able to have individual support and not always group support in schools." - Participant #19

- “People need to be more sensitive and not speak so harshly. You don’t know what anyone’s gone through, you need to be kinder. There needs to be a stop to victim shaming. We need more support for survivors. It’s so traumatizing and there’s a lot of victims.” - Participant #20
- “There needs to be better access to emergency and transitional housing.” - Participant #21
- “You never really understand the full depth of human trafficking unless you’ve gone through it. It’s happening everywhere around you. We walk around with so much shame and guilt and a lot of the time society adds to that shame. It’s great that you’re starting to recognize the impact of human trafficking, but you need to continue to support victims and as well, support the young people that are becoming traffickers”. - Participant #22

ANNEX C: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Table 1: Study participants’ age at the first time of trafficking

Age of participants	Number of participants
13 to 15 years	5
16 to 18 years	10
19 to 21 years	4
22 to 25 years	3
Total	22

Table 2: Number of traffickers by study participants

Number of Traffickers	Number of participants
1 to 3 traffickers	11
4 to 5 traffickers	9
6 traffickers or more	2
Total	22

Table 3: Number of times study participants were trafficked

Number of times being trafficked	Number of Participants
1 time	5
2 times	8
3 times	4
4 times	3
5 times or more	2
Total	22

Table 4: Number of attempts to exit trafficking before being successful

Number of attempts to exit trafficking	Number of participants
No attempts	1
1 attempt	1
2 attempts	0
3 attempts	6
4 attempts	2
5 attempts or more	12
Total	22

Table 5: Number of years study participants were trafficked

Number of years being trafficked	Number of participants
Less than 1 year	2
1 to 3 years	8
3 to 6 years	5
6 to 9 years	4
More than 9 years	2
Not stated	1
Total	22

Table 6: Number of study participants who exited with and without help

Exited with help	Number of participants
With help	11
Without help	11
Total	22

Table 7: Study participants' age the first time accessing support

Age of participant	Number of participants
17 to 19 years	8
20 to 25 years	5
26 to 29 years	2
30 to 35 years	5
36 years or older	2
Total	22

Table 8: Number of years participants have been accessing or have accessed supports

Number of years accessing support	Number of participants
Less than 1 year	2
1 to 3 years	5
3 to 5 years	11
5 to 7 years	3
Not applicable	1
Total	22