



# Victim Services of Waterloo Region

## Fact Sheet on Human Trafficking

### What is Human Trafficking?

Human Trafficking is defined as the use of force, fraud or coercion to get another person to provide services such as labour or commercial sex. For the purpose of this fact sheet we will be discussing Human Trafficking in the context of commercial sex.

Human Trafficking has been a growing crime in Ontario, with incidents reported being doubled annually from 2018 to 2019. This is due to this crime being classified as "high reward" with "low risk" for traffickers. Ontario is classified to be a "hub" for human trafficking, where it is home to approximately 55% of all police-reported incidents. Unfortunately, due to the isolation that occurs within this crime, statistics are unable to capture the full depth to how many people are being victimized by this crime.

### Myths and Misconceptions

**MYTH:** For Human Trafficking to occur, there must be movement or transportation between states, borders, towns.

**FACT:** Human trafficking does not require any movement whatsoever. Victims can be recruited within their hometown, and trafficked within that same town.

**MYTH:** It is always a violent crime.

**FACT:** Majority of traffickers do not use kidnapping, confinement or physical force. Most use psychological means of manipulation.

**MYTH:** Traffickers target victims they don't know.

**FACT:** Many survivors have identified their traffickers as their romantic partner, as well as family members. Traffickers are usually someone they trust.

**MYTH:** Only girls and women can be trafficked.

**FACT:** Men and boys are also victimized by traffickers. LGBTQ+ boys and young men are seen as a particularly vulnerable group to trafficking.

**MYTH:** All commercial sex is human trafficking.

**FACT:** Individuals who are above the age of 18 working within the sex trade are not all victims of human trafficking, although there is more of a vulnerability of recruitment.

**MYTH:** Victims of human trafficking are trafficked from the streets, kidnapped or picked up by a white van.

**FACT:** Schools, Online, through friends, malls, parties, and homes are where majority of traffickers first meet their victims.

### Risk Factors

Traffickers often target individuals with vulnerabilities, or someone they foresee being able to manipulate. Some common risk factors include:

- Unmet basic needs
- Past trauma
- Lack of understanding surrounding healthy relationships
- Individuals struggling with self-esteem, discrimination, poverty, abuse, isolation and other social or family issues
- First Nation, Inuit, and Métis women and girls, youth in care, runaway and homeless youth, persons with disabilities, refugees and migrants, and LGBTQ+ persons are most vulnerable of being trafficked

### Red Flags

Some common signs that someone may be being lured, groomed or exploited by a trafficker are:

- Being controlled by others, driven to and from locations, escorted at all times
- Controlled and watched, having someone else speak for them
- No ID in their possession
- No control of their own money or cellphone
- Not familiar with where they are, not from the area
- No contact with family or friends
- Lying about age or fake ID's
- Dressed in age-inappropriate clothing
- May have new expensive items or money without reason
- Bruises or physical violence signs, malnourished
- Branding with trafficker's name or symbol, could be gang related as well
- Increased drug use

Cont'd on reverse...

## Stages of Exploitation

With the average age of victims of Human Trafficking being 13, it is important to understand how this can happen. Some individuals believe someone being groomed or lured into the sex trade looks like a kidnapping with a white van, but that is not what is most common within Ontario. In fact, it can look exactly like a loving and caring relationship when a trafficker first meets their potential victim.

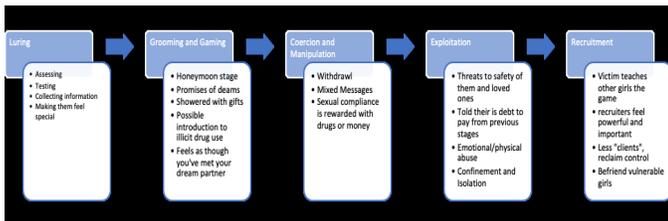
**Luring Stage:** Assessing the right person, testing their vulnerabilities and boundaries, collecting as much information on the victim as possible, making them feel special and seen

**Grooming and Gaming Stage:** "honeymoon" stage, trafficker will sell the victim their dream that they told them during the luring stage, feels as if you've met your dream partner, showering of gifts, possible introduction to illicit drugs

**Coercion and Manipulation:** Withdraw and mixed messages from trafficker, compliance with sex is being rewarded with money or illicit drugs, start to test the trauma bond they have manipulated their victim into

**Exploitation:** threats to their safety as well as loved ones, told they have a debt to pay from "honeymoon" stage of gifts and drugs, and told how they will be paying that debt back, emotional and physical abuse, confinement and isolation from support systems

**Recruitment:** victim teaches other girls how to work for trafficker, recruiters feel powerful and regain some of their control, see less "clients" when recruiting others, befriend vulnerable girls



## Why don't they just leave?

Traffickers have a very strong emotional and mental hold on their victims, which makes it very difficult to leave. Within the beginning stages of exploitation, the traffickers create a trauma bond with their victims. This trauma bond is a psychological hold that one's abusers has on their victim. It is created through the grooming stage, with selling them their dream, and then pulling away. This manipulation makes victims emotionally reliant on their trafficker, and ultimately creates a bond that is difficult to break.

## If you are a Victim of Human Trafficking

Accessing help can be intimidating, and victims can feel isolated and alone. Often, traffickers will convince victims that police and service providers will not believe or help them. You are NOT alone. We are here to help you, and we do believe.

The following are tools to help you get help, stay safe, and if wanting, flee your trafficker:

- If you are in immediate danger, call the police.
- Make a safety plan with a trusted person. This could be a friend, family member, service provider, teacher etc.
- Keep your ID, banking card, and any spare money on you if possible. Some traffickers may get violent if they find you with these things, so keep it in a hidden safe place.
- Have a safe place to go before fleeing. Shelter, trusted persons home etc.
- Have your phone on you and charged.
- Tell someone you trust where you are being made to work, create a code word for safety and for danger.
- Once you have left and are in a safe place, turn your location services off so your trafficker cannot track you.
- Call the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline for resources, support, and further safety planning - 1-833-900-1010



## Victim Services of Waterloo Region

North: 45 Columbia St. E. Waterloo, ON  
Central: 134 Frederick St. Kitchener, ON  
South: 176 Hespeler Rd. Cambridge, ON

Phone: 519-585-2363  
After-Hours: 519-570-5143  
Email: [vswr@wrps.on.ca](mailto:vswr@wrps.on.ca)  
Website: [www.vswr.ca](http://www.vswr.ca)