Research report synthesis

TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: FROM DENIAL TO INVISIBILITY

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Introduction

Trafficking in human beings is the world’s fastest-growing area of criminal activity, and a phenomenon that generates colossal profits. According to the U.S. State Department, more than 12 million adults and children are victims of trafficking, primarily for the purposes of forced labour and sexual exploitation. More specifically, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that approximately 1.7 million people, mainly women and children, are trafficked annually for the purpose of prostitution. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) offers the "conservative" estimate that Canada is an entry point for the trafficking of approximately 600 people every year. Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg are said to be the “hubs” of the trade in women in Canada.

The ILO estimates at US$44 billion per year the profits accumulated worldwide by those who exploit all forms of forced labour, while trafficking for sexual exploitation is estimated to yield approximately US$27.8 billion per year to a globalized and thriving sex industry. In Canada, the sums involved are believed to range between US$120 and US$400 million per year. Closer to home, a prostituted woman generates approximately $1,000 per day for Québec-based criminal organizations, or at least $250,000 per year.

Canada is a country of origin, transit and destination for the trafficking in women for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation:

- A country of origin, because women and children are trafficked domestically and to international destinations;
- A transit country, because the sex industry uses Canada to traffic people into other countries, e.g., the United States;
- A destination country, because women and children from other countries are brought into Québec and other provinces to be sexually exploited.

1 Definition

By trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, we mean the recruitment, transportation, transferring—inside or outside a country, by legal or illegal means — and holding of people, primarily women and children, for the purpose of their sexual exploitation. The sex industry and its agents use various strategies to achieve their aims: threat or use of force, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, and giving or receiving payments or benefits to obtain the consent of a person exercising control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. The trafficking of women and children ensures that male buyers enjoy uninterrupted access to commercial sex while generating exponential profits for traffickers and pimps. It is a mechanism used by the sex industry to supply the prostitution market.

1 All references appear in the full version of our research report: http://iref.uqam.ca/upload/files/Livre_coll__Agora_no4-2012_FinalHR.pdf

2 By "sex industry", we mean all lawful or unlawful activities of individuals or businesses that commercially exploit any person's nudity and/or sexuality, usually that of a woman or girl, in various contexts: street prostitution, sex tourism, pornography, forced marriage or mail-order marriage, phone or internet sex, and in various places such as strip clubs, escort agencies, peep shows, brothels, erotic massage parlours, marriage agencies, etc.
2 Research and Partnership Objectives

For this study we opted to take an action research approach. Our objectives were the following:

1) Develop a better understanding of the reality of prostitution trafficking in Québec, through first-hand documentation guided by the knowledge and perceptions of the main institutional and community stakeholders, and the comments/personal accounts of trafficked women and individuals with experience in the sex industry;

2) Equip and facilitate coordinated action among women's groups and other stakeholders involved in this issue;

3) Help to counter the trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation by challenging laws, institutions and civil society.

It was necessary to conduct the data collection and analysis in several phases. The first (2003-2006) was funded by the Women’s Program of Status of Women Canada (SWC) and by L’Alliance de recherche IREF/Relais-femmes, funded by the Fonds de recherche québécois sur la société et la culture (FQRSC). L’Alliance de recherche IREF/Relais-femmes funded the second phase of our study (2006-2010). At the end, additional support was provided by the Concertation des luttes contre l’exploitation sexuelle (CLES) and the Réseau québécois en études féministes (RéQEF).

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An ad hoc committee coordinated by Lyne Kurtzman and composed of the following individuals finalized the research report:

- Sandrine Ricci, professional researcher
- Marie-Andrée Roy, professor, UQAM Department of Religious Studies and Director of IREF
- Lyne Kurtzman, head of research development at IREF, later head of protocol at UQAM/Relais-femmes, Community Services Department
- Diane Matte, coordinator of the International Secretariat of the World March of Women, and later employee of the Concertation des luttes contre l’exploitation sexuelle (CLES)
- Michèle Roy, representative of the Regroupement québécois des CALACS, and later employee of the Concertation des luttes contre l’exploitation sexuelle (CLES)
- Yolande Geadah, independent researcher
- Louise Dionne, coordinator of the Comité d’action contre la traite humaine interne et internationale (CATHII)

3 Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

Given our comprehensive research goals, we employed a variety of methods with a qualitative approach. A major focus was to identify the processes and dynamics involved in the phenomenon of trafficking. Another was to understand the different aspects of women’s experiences of trafficking in Québec. This would provide us with the basis for recommendations of suitable intervention strategies. We conducted a literature review to document the issue of trafficking at the national and international levels, compile the available statistics, and create an inventory of key determining factors. This phase involved meetings with researchers, legal scholars, officials, and other stakeholders who broadened our perspective on the issues involved in this phenomenon. We also interviewed several informants for an understanding of their first-hand experience of sex trafficking, and, in some cases, to identify the means they employ to resist or prevent exploitation. Our categories of informants were the following:

1) Front-line workers in community or institutional settings, who work with young people, migrants, racialized and ethno-cultural communities, addicts and prostituted people;
2) Individuals with experience in the sex industry;
3) Police officers, mainly from the Montreal police force (Service de police de la Ville de Montréal or SPVM) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP);
4) Officials from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), and Immigration Québec;
5) Female victims and potential victims of trafficking.

In all, we conducted 17 personal interviews, which were transcribed verbatim, and approximately 20 meetings, which were recorded in research notes. We interviewed 3 women who had been trafficked domestically, and obtained a video statement from a 4th victim. We also collected the testimony of a
female migrant. Certain elements of her life story caused us to believe she had been involved in a situation of international trafficking for sexual exploitation. Last, we reconstructed the trajectories of 3 trafficked migrant women based on an interview with a worker in a community group, a police statement, and data from a police investigation. In all, we analyzed 8 cases of women who were prostituted or trafficked into the sex industry, and conducted interviews with 2 men who had performed various functions in the industry.

While not a representative sample covering all facets of trafficking for the purpose of prostitution, this collection of original data and information from secondary sources does confirm the existence of such trafficking of women in Québec and substantiates the qualitative knowledge about this phenomenon.

4 Theoretical Underpinnings

Two fundamental conceptual currents associated with patriarchy and neoliberal capitalism guided our study. In our report, we first outline the new patriarchal order that has arisen in many societies and propose some ideas about the difficult issue of consent and the mode of reproduction of sexage. Next, we present several characteristics of neoliberal capitalism in the context of market globalization, and examine its relationship to the growth of the sex industry and trafficking. Last, we analyze the political underpinnings of the two principal positions on prostitution: abolition and regulation.

5 Determinants of the Trafficking in Women

Several factors are acknowledged as being directly connected with the growth of trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation to satisfy the rising demand for fresh "goods" in the sex industry.

Globalization and neoliberal policies

Neoliberal globalization of international markets and ensuing economic insecurity have considerably increased both women’s poverty and migration, especially of women from economically disadvantaged or politically unstable countries. Individuals and organizations involved in human trafficking, often linked to organized crime, exploit these transformations to amass huge profits, while social and economic inequalities continue to deepen.

Globalization and neoliberal policies have led to massive job losses, while creating a demand for service labour that pushes millions of women and girls from the global South, Asia, and Eastern Europe to migrate toward Northern and Western societies. Currently, women’s employment perspectives are significantly affected by the marketization of reproductive labour and worldwide expansion of care services: care for children, the old, and the sick, domestic help, and, now, prostitution. North and South, the expansion of care work stems from the naturalization and undervaluation of women’s labour, reflecting the gender relations model that prevails in all patriarchal societies.

4 Term coined by the French feminist theoretician Colette Guillaumin to designate the class relationship whereby the bodies, work and time of women as a whole are appropriated for the personal and social benefit of men as a whole.
In addition to exacerbating exploitation and oppression, economic globalization has reinforced the commercialization of the prostitution industry across the planet and consequently, the trafficking of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

*Increased border controls and the criminalization of migrant populations*

Although the reorganization of the global economy favours the free movement of goods and capital, it also generates increased controls on workforce mobility and the mobility of persons. Globalization is associated with tighter controls at the borders of Western countries and tougher immigration criteria, leading more people to resort to smugglers and agencies that provide migration "services". This increases women’s vulnerability to the traps laid by organized crime networks. In addition, the criminalization of migrants lacking the requisite documentation encourages the abuse and hyper-exploitation of the most vulnerable among them.

The problem is complex. Both overly coercive and overly flexible policies may contribute to reinforcing the trafficking in women; hence the urgent need to replace a handful of disconnected policies with a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the problem of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. To this end, critical attention must be paid to the role of our political institutions with regard to their overtly inferiorizing approach to citizens of diverse backgrounds, policies which we believe contribute to the expansion of trafficking for the purpose of prostitution.

*Indigenous, migrant and racialized women are the main targets of trafficking*

Many scholars identify women’s social and economic vulnerability as a major cause of trafficking (Oxman-Martinez, Hanley and Lacroix, 2005; Poulin, 2004; CSF, 2002). In Canada and Québec, certain categories of women are identified as the main targets of domestic and international trafficking: immigrant, racialized, and Indigenous women. Our study highlights the vulnerability of these women to sexism and racism, especially in the Québec labour market, as well as the discriminatory immigration policies under which most poor and lesser educated women are granted access to only temporary work visas.

Canada has adopted a two-tiered immigration system: a permanent track that offers a full set of rights to skilled workers, and a temporary track for unskilled workers that provides them with very few rights and is administered under various programs, including the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP).

When it comes to Indigenous women, precariousness aggravates the systemic discrimination faced by First Nations people. As a result of Canadian colonization, with its tools of assimilation, First Nations women have experienced an endemic level of dysfunctional family situations, including a long history of sexual assault and domestic violence, alcoholism, drug addiction and mental health problems.

All of these exclusion factors heighten the disparity between the living conditions of women belonging to immigrant, Indigenous, and other racialized groups, and those, not only of their male counterparts, but of other women.
Organized crime

Several studies indicate that Canadian cities are major hubs for both transit to the United States and local exploitation of women. In the Toronto area, trafficking appears to be primarily controlled by Russian organized crime, and in Vancouver, by Asian crime gangs. It is common for trafficked women and girls to be exploited in destination countries by pimps and brothel-owners of their own nationality or from the same geographical area. In Québec, prostitution trafficking networks are mainly controlled by large criminal organizations, including bikers and mafia groups. The role of street gangs is often confined to recruitment. Montreal is considered to be a Mecca for sex tourism.

The shuttling of women, including minors, is done both legally, through temporary work visas, and illegally, using false documents. Constant moves ensure that trafficking victims are hard to trace, especially since transportation is mostly arranged via illegal channels, increasing the vulnerability of trafficked women. Migrant women end up at the mercy of traffickers, who often confiscate their passports and money. Many are then forced into prostitution to repay debts incurred for their illegal entry, debts ranging from US$35,000 to US$40,000.

The media: accomplices of the sex industry

All types of media play a role in the re/production of social representations that trivialize the commodification of women’s bodies and sexuality, but they are also integral to the expansion of the sex industry and the growth of trafficking. For instance, traffickers use newspapers and the Internet to recruit and advertise the services of prostitution victims. The first person sentenced for human trafficking in Canada prostituted teenage girls this way, attracting buyers with ads for erotic services and photos of victims posted on websites.

The demand for commercial sex

Consumers of commercial sex also contribute to the expansion of trafficking and prostitution. Given the insatiable demand, trafficking in women and girls for commercial sexual exploitation is a highly lucrative business: it is considered the third largest source of revenue for organized crime, right after drug sales and the arms trade. Male customers purchase "sexual services" without the slightest concern for the abusive conditions and exploitation prevalent in the prostitution system. Even the most "well-intentioned" Johns cannot distinguish between trafficked and non-trafficked women.

6 Legal and Political Contexts of Trafficking

In November 2005, the Canadian Parliament passed Bill C-49 to amend the Criminal Code with respect to trafficking in persons. Canada is also a signatory to various international legal agreements and humanitarian law treaties with provisions for protection against violence. The Palermo Protocol, adopted by the United Nations in 2000, targets trafficking specifically. However, divergent positions on prostitution legislation and the definition of trafficking are undermining the effectiveness of these legal instruments. Undeniably, the number of convictions for human trafficking cases in our courts is very low, and sentences, when imposed, are brief.
According to RCMP figures from October 2011, there have been nine human trafficking convictions, all of them in Ontario and Québec, involving domestic trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Since the late 1990s, Canadian courts' interpretation of the legislation has steadily loosened, beginning with the acceptance of almost total nudity, followed by table dancing, and eventually, direct physical contact with bar patrons. These changes gradually facilitated the recruitment of women, including migrant women, into prostitution. The recent appeal decision in Bedford v. Canada could be the determining factor leading to the total decriminalization of prostitution.

7 The Law Enforcement Community and the Fight Against Trafficking

Knowledge about, and commitment to stopping sex trafficking varies greatly among law enforcement officers, whether the RCMP, the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM), the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) or the municipal police forces. Unquestionably, the Sûreté du Québec's lack of an action plan to uncover trafficking activity in the numerous strip clubs located on their territory grants almost total impunity to traffickers, evidenced by the fact that it is commonly known that these businesses are fronts for prostitution.

Some of our respondents within the police stressed their desire to strengthen partnerships with the community sector and NGOs to deal with the issue of trafficking. It is also essential to pursue and intensify training efforts with various actors within the legal system. Lack of information about trafficking legislation is partly responsible for low number of arrests for trafficking.

Furthermore, the false distinction between adult and juvenile prostitution, coupled with the downplaying or normalization of prostitution, undermine police initiatives and proactivity, creating a real obstacle to the fight against trafficking. In addition, it appears that domestic trafficking accounts for most of the trafficking cases investigated by the police. Domestic trafficking is easier to investigate than international trafficking, as it is more circumscribed geographically. Spotting domestic or international trafficking victims nevertheless poses challenges that will only truly be met if anti-trafficking action is made a real priority at all policy levels and adequate human resources and budgets are allocated.

8 Viewpoints of the Community Sector

The perspectives of the front-line community-based practitioners we encountered who work with potential trafficking victims and individuals vulnerable to sexual exploitation testify to a diffuse and fragmented knowledge of trafficking. Their narratives reflect the two sides of the prostitution debate: those who work with prostituted individuals are more likely to take the regulatory position, while those who work with immigrants and disadvantaged youth are more aligned with the abolitionist perspective. These two positions stem from radically divergent perspectives on prostitution, in which the former groups view it as "sex work," while the latter groups understand prostitution as an asymmetrical power relationship manifested by men's appropriation and exploitation of women's bodies.

These theoretical perspectives seem to have a strong impact on intervention strategies, although most respondents agreed that despite these differences, it is important to acknowledge that some individuals are being exploited and tools should be available to assist them.
But this is precisely the problem, because without a common definition of trafficking, it is impossible to agree on what situations may be characterized as trafficking.

Domestic trafficking is usually defined as a phenomenon involving a minor victim from a troubled or disadvantaged family background. When it comes to international trafficking, prostitution is sometimes viewed as an employment opportunity in Canada for migrant women, regardless of whether they were prostituted in their home country. From this perspective, "genuine" trafficking cases would be rare.

All the respondents confirmed the difficulty of identifying situations of trafficking. They are like puzzles, the pieces of which must be put together to obtain a comprehensive understanding that will enable us to assist the victims. But there are always missing pieces to the puzzle, mainly due to the impenetrable character of these environments that are usually connected with organized crime. Moreover, because they are trying to form and maintain relationships built on trust, practitioners are hesitant about questioning potential victims. As for sex trafficking victims, marked by their time in harsh surroundings, they are reluctant to acknowledge or discuss their experiences. This reticence is partly explains why the violence of commercial sexual exploitation remains hidden, and a wall of silence around trafficking, a phenomenon that is by definition underground, is maintained.

9 Life Trajectories in the Sex Industry

The report presents the life stories of women trafficked or exploited in different sectors of the sex industry, mostly in Québec. Four of them inform us about migrant women’s experiences and knowledge about sex trafficking, and four other cases describe domestic trafficking of young Québec women, providing an empirical perspective of the sex industry in Québec.

In addition to an unstable family environment, characterized by a series of structural or relational problems, the latter stories involve behaviours considered by youth protection workers to be “high risk,” including running away, truancy, family breakdowns, substance abuse, etc. Several trajectories emphasize the critical problem of the vulnerability of girls to the promises of pimps, particularly girls living in youth centres and who are runaways.

However, the individual behaviour and vulnerability of prostituted women should be treated as such, and not seen as factors that explain prostitution or trafficking. These phenomena have a structural basis, and their agents implement various strategies of control, manipulation and physical violence.

The case of Karen, a victim of transnational trafficking, is exceptional in our empirical data, but certainly not in terms of the reality of trafficking. She was recruited in her country of origin—a country she wanted to leave to escape from a violent environment. Initially, this young woman from East Africa was neither forced nor threatened by the “runner,” who ultimately exploited her vulnerability and her desire to leave her country. She was lured, then sequestered and threatened with denunciation. Her story of deception is typical of sex trafficking, and confirms that domestic and international trafficking and immigration situations involving human smugglers are often closely intertwined.

Our research findings also demonstrate the existence of trafficking situations that involve migrant women recruited outside of their country of origin. Here again, the trafficker exploits a situation of vulnerability due to illegal status and the trauma of violence experienced in the home country. Martha was not recruited or forced to come to Canada for the purpose of prostitution. Like Karen, she left her
country to escape sexual violence and poverty. It was after she had arrived in Québec and was living here illegally, that the man whom she had considered her friend trafficked her into prostitution.

The trajectories of the migrant women were very similar to those of Québec-born respondents in terms of psychosocial vulnerability factors, including their economic disadvantage, which make it very difficult for them to escape sexual exploitation. Both the differences and similarities between women’s trajectories demonstrate the ability of prostitutors to take advantage of a wide range of circumstances to achieve their goals. Whether migrants, refugees, Québec-born, minors, adults, racialized or not, all the women ended up destitute, and all were mislead and prostituted.

10 From Luring and Recruitment to Sexual Exploitation

Our analysis of the accounts and experiences pertaining to these women’s individual trajectories includes findings from interviews with two men who spent many years in the sex industry occupying a variety of functions, including prostitute, john, driver, pusher, and agency owner.

Based on these stories, we were able to document the conditions under which fresh recruits are placed in strip clubs, escort agencies and massage parlours. They illustrate how pimps use promises of love to entice young and not so young women into their ultimate enslavement for trafficking purposes, within a time frame ranging from a few hours to a few weeks. These accounts also reveal both the involvement of organized crime, and individuals who, though not always officially members of gangs or mafias, are nevertheless engaged in criminal activities on a daily basis, specifically to traffic women, including minors, in a variety "circuits," usually via employment agencies and classified ads. Our data therefore reveals the role played by these employment agencies for strippers and escorts, which, under a veneer of legality, shuttle contingents of trafficked women around Québec and out of the province.

Starting with the physical branding of recruits after their first customer, entry into the prostitution market unfolds in a series of stages and intermediaries that comprise the underpinnings of the culture and operations of a well-honed system. We observe that prostituted women are vulnerable, not only to the enticements of the pimps who blatantly exploit them, but also to the abusive behaviour of buyers, drug dealers and an inherently harmful overall environment.

Violence in every form—physical, psychological, sexual and economic—is used by pimps to control their recruits and coerce them into generating maximum earnings, since money is the key determinant in trafficking.

The strategy of creating a bogus emotional or romantic relationship to recruit and retain girls and women in prostitution pervades both domestic and international trafficking situations. Women’s feelings of love are exploited and they are made to believe they are helping out their temporarily penniless Prince Charming. Our respondents described pimps who present themselves as a prosperous gentleman out to seduce his “princess”, enticing her with a vision of fabulous wealth and a glamorous lifestyle. After a honeymoon during which he steadily consolidates his emotional dominance, the pimp informs his recruit that she must contribute to maintain their lifestyle or pay off accumulated debts. A common variation of this tactic is debt bondage, in which pimps require recruits to reimburse the costs incurred for their use of alcohol or drugs. This type of luring also occurs at the international level, when traffickers extort "sexual services" (payment in kind) or prostitution with other men to pay women’s way.
The shuttling of women from one strip bar to the next in the Montreal region, across Québec, and even across Canada and abroad, seems to be a central aspect of the prostitution system in strip clubs. Prostituted women are shipped from region to region to garner more money for pimps eager to cash in on buyers’ desire for novelty. Pimps also move women around to isolate them and avoid losing them to another pimp or enterprising customer. Exacerbating feelings of rivalry among prostituted women is another strategy to further isolate them, and maintain them in a state of sexual slavery for the exclusive benefit of the sex industry and its male customers.

The sexually exploited women whose personal accounts we analyzed expressed a rather vague and dissociated vision of their interactions with buyers, and relief at having suffered only “a few” bad encounters. Whether they were escorts or strippers, they definitely prefer to remember the “good customers,” those who did not abuse them physically, or who even “spoiled” them. Given the violence they experienced at the hands of their pimps, it is not surprising that they view their relationships with customers in a more positive light.

Their accounts also reveal the internalization of the prevailing values of the sex industry and the role of sexual object they were forced to play, suffused with self-denigration and denial of the violence they endured. Some of the accounts point to the need for more examination of the role of the buyers of commercial sex; without this aspect, research efforts such as our own, which are designed to curb the growth of human trafficking, will have no practical effect.

11 Obstacles to Exiting Sexual Slavery

The women whose trajectories we studied have been immersed in a system that produces and reproduces their alienation. In the sex industry, they have been subjected to violence with serious consequences for their mental health, unquestionably of a traumatic nature. Escaping the yoke of a pimp is a difficult process. Having him convicted and incarcerated has proven to be crucial in this regard, clearly one argument against the total decriminalization of prostitution that is being advocated by the pro sex work camp. Still, the aftermath of these arrests often proves arduous, as women caught up in sexual slavery tend to lose their bearings when released from the pimp’s control. Some of our respondents even remained active within the sex industry for a significant period.

Their stories nevertheless point to several “winning conditions” for exiting prostitution: these are, first and foremost, the arrest of the pimp and the support of a close acquaintance. Julie, Caroline, Audrey and Naomi also wished to share with others about the process of introspection in which they engaged during this time. There was a dual purpose here: to free themselves of the weight of their experience and enable others, including potential victims, to benefit from what they have learned, with a view to preventing and eliminating sexual exploitation. Escaping sexual slavery is nonetheless an extremely arduous endeavour, not surprising given the devastating impact of the systemic violence so central to sex trafficking.

12 Analytical Assessment: the Function of Systemic Violence in Prostitution Trafficking

Trafficking in women for the purpose sexual exploitation is the business of the organizations and individuals that supply the sex trade, often through agencies in the form of above-ground businesses, such as strip clubs, massage parlours, hotels, and also at discreet sites such as brothels that are set up in
private homes. Trafficking is also linked to street prostitution and to corporate producers of pornography. Frequently linked with organized crime, the sex industry exploits for huge profits the vulnerability of women and girls wishing to escape difficult living conditions. The systemic violence inherent to this type of trafficking, which can rightfully be labelled as sexual slavery for commercial purposes, facilitates the reproduction of relationships founded on domination and exploitation. After analyzing our research findings, we have come to focus on three dimensions of this systemic violence:

**12.1 Cultural downplaying of the commodification of women’s bodies and sexuality as an instrument of social violence**

As with other markets that have been "liberalized," the global sex industry exerts considerable pressure on political and legal bodies to relax regulations that impede its financial growth. The legalization of lap-dancing by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1999, followed by the legalization of "swingers clubs" in 2005, the recent decision in Bedford v. Canada, and the ambiguity of government policies with regard to the trade in foreign nude dancers (the exotic dancing visas "scandal") are all examples of the deregulation of the sex industry and normalization of the commodification of women.

Currently, the notion of free choice and the trivialization of prostitution pervade the discourse of various stakeholders, both in the community sector, including the women's movement, and among agents of the State. Internalizing such a discourse can lead girls, and also boys, to believe that "sex work" might be a way to gain status or recognition—e.g., the figure of the *black pimp*—material goods, or independence from their family. But, our findings depict an environment for strippers and escorts that is diametrically opposed to the popular romanticized images of the high-class call girl, dedicated courtesan, or ambitious escort so engrained in collective male fantasy.

The use of commercial sex has become increasingly normalized as a form of entertainment, presented as "natural" in terms of the roles dictated by sexual and sexist stereotypes. Its trivialization bolsters the myth of male sexuality as a biologically determined irrepressible desire that must be satisfied to maintain social order and prevent outbursts stemming from repressed impulses. In this patriarchal ideology, women are responsible for satisfying men's sexual desires, whatever the circumstances. This is the kind of myth that abolitionist feminists want to dissolve, by promoting sexuality as something that should be celebrated as part of a quest for equality rather than exploited in commercial relationships that generate violence and exploitation.

In the new patriarchal order, the cultural trivialization or commodification of women’s bodies and sexuality fosters trafficking for sexual exploitation, the primary purpose of which is to provide buyers/prostitutors with access to a given type or class of prostituted women. The more those in this prostituted (sub)class are poor, marginalized, products of "dysfunctional" families, or regions in the grip of political instability, the more they are vulnerable to exploitation and the less access they have to the resources they need to exit prostitution.

A culture that trivializes the commodification of women’s bodies and sexualities constitutes a form of social violence, because it legitimizes the development of the sex industry and the growing exploitation of women and girls, thus hindering the chances of achieving egalitarian gender relations and liberation for all women, beginning with those now being prostituted. With regard to the socially imposed compulsory acceptance of sex as a commercial exchange, the pressure of conformism and individualism has never weighed as heavily on girls and women.
12. 2 False consent as a manifestation of victims' internalized sexism

Our study demonstrates how male domination operates in sex trafficking, revealing the violence inherent in prostitution and the tyrannizing of trafficked women. The process of establishing power and control over prostituted women is facilitated by their internalized feelings of inferiority, causing them to yield rather than consent to relations rooted in domination. We define internalization as the acceptance and integration of standards, judgments, expectations and representations of the dominant society. Of course, everyone has a degree of manoeuvring room that enables them to eventually break free, distance themselves or challenge these standards, but given the power of the inculcation process here, such an enterprise is gruelling, as evidenced by the difficulties prostituted women experience in extricating themselves from the sex industry.

We observe that in the new patriarchal order, pervasive (neo)liberalism fosters the impression that everyone is free and equal. When the categories of dominant/oppressed are no longer recognized, it becomes possible to attribute some form of "consent" to any oppressed individual. This obscures the fact that consent requires knowledge of the situation in its various components, and the acceptance of both positive and negative consequences. In addition, everything is made to look as if there was nothing really immoral in the behaviour of the dominant party since the oppressed is considered to have consented. This type of analysis leads to the manipulation of such principles as agency, empowerment, freedom to control one's body, even sexual liberation. As a result, the oppressed person stays in her place, believing she is in control of her situation. The sex industry has excelled in appropriating these principles to keep prostituted women on the job in a lucrative market.

The argument that prostituted women negotiate the terms of the exchange with the buyers ignores the social, economic, and political dynamics of human relations, and the miserable living conditions and violence to which many prostituted women are subjected. Consent thus becomes a tool of oppression, used to justify power relations that take advantage of people's socio-economic vulnerability. In short, it legitimizes sexage, a concept that encompasses the individual and collective appropriation of women's bodies, time, and labour. This is why we believe it is necessary to reiterate that the discourse of consent to sexual exploitation constitutes an ideal means to ensure male appropriation of women; it is a manifestation of gender-based violence internalized by victims and a central element of the systemic violence at work in trafficking for the purpose of prostitution.

12.3 The prostitution industry and trafficking activities as an exacerbated manifestation of patriarchal violence

Whether for domestic or international trafficking, the prostitution industry employs various forms of violence—physical, psychological, sexual, and, of course, financial—to enslave and exploit its recruits. In contrast to popular belief, deception, in the form of a trap, deceit, manipulation, or emotional blackmail—all corollaries of psychological violence—is a central element of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, especially at the recruitment stage.

From the traffickers' point of view, deception produces favourable results, with less risk than direct violence. More overtly violent—and more visible—means, including sequestration, assault, sexual assault, and retaliation against the victim's family, are often employed later in the trafficking process, after the victim has been "hooked".
These tactics are used for psychological conditioning to appropriate her income, control her use of time, mobility, etc. Without minimizing the physical and economic violence to which they are subjected, it seems that initially women are recruited and maintained in the sex industry through psychological manipulation that exploits their need for love.

This means that when it comes to identifying cases of trafficking, we should not expect to see evidence of overt violence, but rather be able to detect the more insidious forms of manipulation. Consider the difference between visible and invisible violence as similar to the difference between a black eye and blackmail.

From luring to total control, there is no shortage of means for convincing women to yield (rather than consent) to the appropriation and exploitation of their bodies by the prostitution industry. Integral to the socio-symbolic system, getting tattooed with the pimp’s image is particularly symbolic of this appropriation: “If you love me, you will get tattooed with my name”. Here, the dominant person literally marks the oppressed person, announcing the social relationship between them. This is the case even if the oppressed person appears to have “decided” by herself to get the tattoo. Violence allows the dominant group to reaffirm the appropriated status of the prostituted class, a condition constantly affirmed by their tattoo, and other external signs of their physical transformation, such as breast implants, weight loss, hair de/colouring, waxing, tanning, etc.

Whether or not trafficking is involved, the prostitution industry thrives by appropriating women who are viewed as merchandise—even perishable goods—given the turnover demanded by a market (customers) with an insatiable appetite for young bodies. This appropriation is a structural form of violence inherent in prostitution. Furthermore, customers do not hesitate to use physical abuse to obtain all the "services" they believe they deserve. By maintaining a special category of women—prostitutes—patriarchal and capitalist society ensure that all men have access to full range of "sexual services".

13 Conclusion: From Denial to Invisibility

Our research shows the extent to which trafficking for sexual exploitation is made invisible by a shroud of silence stemming from various factors, including the impenetrability and violence of the criminal underworld, ineffective laws, a general lack of resources for prevention and control, poorly equipped front-line community workers and the increasing trend to normalize the commodification of women’s bodies and sexuality.

Certain voices suggest that the harm of trafficking is being exaggerated, including its links with commercial sexual exploitation. They claim that for women, migration and prostitution are expressions of resistance and freedom. Those instigating this denial of the reality of prostitution trafficking point to inconsistent statistical data that make it difficult to measure the scope of the phenomenon. In fact, the paucity of quantitative data on violence against women, and this, despite the best efforts of feminist researchers, reflects the global political will to deny the existence of patriarchal and male violence.

While not all prostitution-related activities can be considered as trafficking, the practices of transporting, coercing and isolating sex industry recruits appear to be characteristic of commercial sexual exploitation. In Québec and elsewhere, both domestically and internationally, the purpose of trafficking is to supply a market driven by the increasing, mostly male demand for female bodies and exotic sex at the lowest possible price.
The existence, reproduction and growth of trafficking in women therefore seem to us to be inseparable from the prostitution industry.

The metaphor of the Hydra is useful to illustrate the difficulty of accurately identifying and preventing the trafficking of women, and its capacity to adapt, be reinforced, and mutate when threatened or attacked. Trafficking has indeed several heads: the normalization of prostitution and sexual violence; the pornification of public space; a patriarchal culture centred on male desire, the submission of young women, and the exploitation of women’s need for love; the growing demand for recruits to exploit in the sex industry; vulnerability factors associated with certain family environments, and unfavourable socioeconomic conditions in the home country connected with globalization; exclusionary immigration policies; isolation and discrimination in the host society, etc.

Patriarchal violence reaches intolerable levels in the sex industry, and pseudo-consent is a manifestation of internalized violence among its victims. But one of the most pernicious aspects of the problem—one that we need to locate and weed out in society—is the culture that trivializes and naturalizes the consumption of commercial sex, since that culture drives the re/production of patriarchy. The expansion of prostitution, its trivialization as evidenced in its characterization as “a job like any other,” and the scope of the trafficking in women for sexual exploitation all clearly indicate the renewed ability of patriarchy to objectify women, and make them into instruments dedicated to the domestic and sexual comfort of men on this planet, and the service of market interests.

We therefore conclude that the trafficking of women for prostitution should be acknowledged as one of the ways patriarchy reconstructs itself, reinforced by capitalism and other unequal power relations in our societies.

14 Recommendations

A Coordinated Strategy to Fight the Trafficking of Women for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation

Preamble

No human being should be treated like merchandise. Yet this is the situation of thousands of women and children around the world, who find themselves sexually exploited by domestic and international trafficking networks. Sexual exploitation for commercial purposes is one of the main manifestations of patriarchal violence against women and girls, and it is a barrier to gender equality. Prostitution and trafficking are inseparable issues, trafficking being one of the supply mechanisms for the global sex market.

In Québec and elsewhere, sexual exploitation of girls and women is closely tied to persisting sexual inequality, an exponential increase in the commodification of women’s bodies and sexuality, and poverty. This exploitation targets the most vulnerable persons, particularly in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, age, family history, etc. In Canada, Indigenous women are over-represented in the sex industry and are among its principal victims. Their accentuated vulnerability stems from the impact of persisting patriarchal and capitalist values in Canada that is compounded by the underlying colonial context.
Trafficking and sexual exploitation for commercial purposes exist within a political context characterized by the hegemony of the neoliberal economic model and a neocolonialist relationship with First Nations peoples.

Because it is a violation of all women’s fundamental rights, sexual exploitation for commercial purposes concerns all women, not just the most vulnerable or those who are currently in the sex industry. Similarly, women’s migration is a feminist issue that most directly concerns the migrant women whose basic human rights are violated at the systemic level, but that also concerns women as a group.

All women need to be united in the struggle against sexual exploitation since, from the perspective of prostitutes, customers and pimps, all women are potentially for sale or purchase, and their bodies deemed an "inexhaustible natural resource" of high market value.

We urgently need to take action.

We urge the Canadian government to meet the commitments associated with its signing of the Palermo Protocol, which requires signatory states to make every effort to prevent trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, to support trafficked children and women, and to ensure that trafficked persons be allowed to remain in the host country. Québec and Canada should establish the legal, political, and social conditions that will offer women alternatives to commercial sexual exploitation, conditions that will prevent their being forced to enter the sex industry and not contribute to maintaining them there.

The Québec government must ensure full application of its Act to Combat Poverty and Exclusion, and implement measures to enable women to escape poverty (higher minimum wage, better welfare entitlements, access to social housing, employment programs designed to meet Indigenous and immigrant women’s needs, etc.).

We stress the importance of coordinated action and international networking to identify trafficking and the countless associated problems, and develop tools for combatting it. Based on our analysis, we underline the importance of addressing the systems of oppression in play here and pooling efforts to oppose the multiple forms of discrimination, especially with regard to employment, which particularly harm women from racialized, immigrant, and Indigenous backgrounds, who sit at the bottom of the ladder in the world of prostitution and pay the highest price in terms of violence and poverty. Cooperative strategies must also address the rights and protection of migrant women facing discrimination or forced into poverty in their home countries.

Most of the recommendations in this study address both domestic and international trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. We have divided them into three main action areas:

1. Change attitudes about prostitution
2. Political and legal change
3. Change intervention practices

All of our recommendations depend on two major considerations: the existence of political will at different decision-making levels to support their implementation; and the provision of sufficient State funding of the public and community-based services that will be responsible for their implementation.
Since new practices must be developed, it is important to support and strengthen non-governmental organizations who have already gained valuable first-hand experience with those who are sexually exploited for commercial purposes.

**Recommendation No 1**

**Change attitudes about prostitution: awareness-raising, training and research**

We recommend that the different levels of government and ministries implement coordinated initiatives to promote attitudinal changes regarding commercial sexual exploitation and the normalization of prostitution. Like the public campaigns on domestic violence, these initiatives would have several components and address different target audiences, in particular, the customers. Because the normalization of commercial sex consumption is (re)produced socially through various channels, we specifically call for a broad campaign of public debate on the question of the consumption of commercial sex in Québec and sex tourism in countries of the global South and East.

We urge Québec's ministry of education to make gender equality education a priority in elementary and secondary schools and to integrate throughout their curriculum content designed to promote equalitarian relationships, and this, from the earliest age. We recommend that this go beyond sex education classes, although this aspect should of course be provided to students. The need is all the more urgent, given that recent reforms have eliminated the Personal and Social Training (PST) classes, leaving many young people with pornography as their only source of information about sexuality. We recommend that support be given to efforts to better educate young girls and boys in these matters, as a way of countering the prevailing discourse that downplays, and even glamorizes prostitution and, by extension, “pornifies” public and private spaces. Schools and society must promote sexuality that is not based on the patriarchal and heteronormative model.

We recommend that all levels of government support the development of training tools for front-line workers that adopt a feminist perspective, highlighting the power relationships underlying sex trafficking. By front-line workers, we mean all persons likely to encounter trafficking victims, whether in institutional or community settings, including in legal, health, police, border control, social service and youth centre environments; civil society organizations that serve women, the poor, drug addicts, immigrants, racialized or refugee people and Indigenous communities; and organizations that advocate for worker rights, including family caregivers, etc. These training tools should be developed by different institutions and organizations based on the mandates, modes of intervention and cultural traits of their respective communities. The objectives:

- Familiarize front-line practitioners with the issues of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation;
- Empower them to counter the culture that promotes the consumption and normalization of prostitution;
- Involve them in the prevention of trafficking in their community;
- Help them spot cases of trafficking;
- Provide practitioners with appropriate referral information for victims.
Trafficking for the purpose of prostitution is a complex problem that calls for more research and heightened concern on the part of authorities and all of the social stakeholders, especially the women's movement. The differing perspectives on prostitution have resulted in a failure to take any action and fragmentary and sketchy knowledge about trafficking, hence the need for further (and adequately funded) research (universities in partnership with communities).

For example:

- Create a directory of best practices for holding men accountable and dissuading them from consuming commercial sex;
- Conduct a scientific study of the role of media and the impact of the new technologies with regard to the growth of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation;
- Document the impacts of (domestic and international) trafficking of Indigenous women, both on and off reserve, and the link between the disappearances of Indigenous women and their sexual exploitation for commercial purposes.

Recommendation No 2
Political and legal change

We reiterate the importance of having clear laws and regulations acknowledging that sexual exploitation for commercial purposes, in whatever form, constitutes violence against women and undermines equality between women and men. Consequently, the various levels of government should decriminalize prostituted persons and counter the demand for commercial sex by criminalizing customers and all those who profit from the prostitution of others. Criminalizing the purchase of sex is the only way to reduce the trafficking of women for prostitution purposes. We recommend that all levels of government implement effective measures to end all forms of criminalization, prosecution, systemic harassment, and denial of justice with regard to prostituted women, including trafficking survivors.

All law enforcement services must also be involved in the fight against trafficking, preferably in the form of coordinated action. Police units must be given the legal means to investigate places of prostitution to flush out the prostitutes. Massage parlours, strip clubs and other commercial sex venues are ideal sites for hiding women who are being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. To ensure that the support of prostituted women is prioritized in the course of such law enforcement actions, police must receive gender equality training with the perspective of abolishing sexual exploitation.

Despite legislative reforms that resulted in the inclusion in 2005 of human trafficking in the Canadian Criminal Code, trafficking convictions are rare, and sentences very short. We recommend a review of the Criminal Code sections on trafficking, which are interpreted too narrowly, leading Québec's prosecutors to mostly charge traffickers with pimping rather than trafficking, and exhibit reluctance to press charges in cases of domestic trafficking.

We recommend that Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) collaborate with police departments with a view to protecting victims. We support the federal government’s recent decision to abolish the exotic dancers visa program, given that it could function as a gateway for trafficking and exploitation of many
forms. In an effort to make the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act more consistent with Canada's obligations under international legislation, we recommend that victims of trafficking be made admissible for permanent residence by creating a special claimants category that would take into account a series of relevant factors, including physical or mental harm related to having been trafficked, as well as the risk of being sexually exploited and trafficked again if expelled from our country.

We recommend that the Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse du Québec—whose mandate is the promotion and implementation of the rights recognized by the Youth Protection Act and by the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms—determine the rights of female and male victims of child prostitution who are remanded in the custody of the Director of Youth Protection. The Commission must take action regarding the problem of youth centres, where the recruitment of sexually exploited youths and pimps continues to thrive. Moreover, we argue that in matters of consent, the distinction between adult and juvenile prostitution is inconsistent and dangerous.

Recommendation No 3
Change intervention practices: grass-roots resources and support for women dealing with trafficking and sexual exploitation

We recommend that the various levels of government support the following measures:

- Creating and strengthening support structures focused on exiting prostitution and specifically addressing the needs of trafficking victims: safe housing, social and vocational rehabilitation services, physical and mental health services (including detoxification), legal and administrative support, etc.;

- Creating in Montreal, as a first step, a short- and medium-term shelter resource to accommodate women struggling with issues related to trafficking. This resource would offer shelter to trafficked women, but also to women subjected to various forms of threats, harassment or coercion from sex industry operatives;

- Creating a shelter structure and resources specific to Indigenous women struggling with issues related to trafficking for sexual exploitation;

- Creating a specialized shelter component for girls who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation, with a flexible and adapted policy concerning runaways;

- Creating a toll-free help and referral line.

We invite all stakeholders concerned with the issue of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation to work together and implement specific and comprehensive initiatives to address the continuum of violence against women. We must wage a united struggle for women's equality and sexual exploitation cannot be separated from all other forms of patriarchal and male violence. Consequently, the social paradigm needs to change, meaning both popular conceptions and the laws related to the commodification of women's bodies and sexuality. This would translate into the refusal of all proposals for total decriminalization or legalization of prostitution.
Instead we invite the various governmental decision-makers and civil society to reflect in a coordinated manner on how to develop a Canadian legal framework to address all forms of violence against women, including prostitution, similar to the Swedish legislative model entitled *Kvinnofrid* or “Peace for Women”. Its goal would be to create and harmonize a comprehensive set of measures aimed at safeguarding women’s integrity and dignity, with an integrated approach to address all forms of violence against women: prostitution, pornography, domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment, etc.

Only with such a comprehensive approach will our society be able to properly monitor the indicators of genuine equality between women and men and among women themselves. Only then will we be truly effective in transforming the social practices and representations that negatively impact the collective and individual lives of women.

Translation from French: Martin Dufresne et Nicole Kennedy

Full version of the research report (in French):
http://iref.uqam.ca/upload/files/Livre_coll__Agora_no4-2012_FinalHR.pdf