



JUSTICE INSTITUTE  
of BRITISH COLUMBIA



## **Violence in the Lives of Sexually Exploited Youth and Adult Sex Workers in BC**

**Provincial Research  
Final Report  
2006**

**CFCS** | CHILD, FAMILY AND  
COMMUNITY SAFETY

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and Sexual Exploitation

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## Project Report At-A-Glance

*Violence in the Lives of Sexually Exploited Youth and Adult Sex Workers in BC* was a research project conducted by community-based researchers at the Justice Institute of BC. Sarah Hunt, Natalie Clark and Melanie Mark visited 5 areas of BC during 2005, talking to people about violence in their communities. The communities they visited included Victoria, Campbell River, Kamloops, Terrace, and Prince George, as well as the smaller communities surrounding these 5 locations. These communities were chosen for the project based on an expressed need to focus on rural realities rather than larger cities such as Vancouver that have well-established resources for addressing sexual exploitation and sex work.

The researchers interviewed youth and adults about their experiences as victims or witnesses of violence and talked to front-line workers, police and others about the role that the justice system plays in the lives of victims who have been sexually exploited or who work in the sex trade. This report is intended to provide a provincial overview of violence in the lives of sexually exploited youth and adult sex workers in BC, to review the informal and formal supports that are available, and to identify what communities can do to better respond to this violence.

This final report has been divided in to the following sections:

*Project Overview and Background* outlines the goals and purpose of the research, the methodology developed for the project, the role of community advisories and the involvement of experiential youth and adults.

*Provincial Overview* includes three sections: Focus on Violence, Focus on Formal and Informal Community Supports, and Focus on the Justice System. These sections are intended to identify provincial themes, connections between communities, key barriers to reporting violence, and common experiences of those involved in the sex trade or sexual exploitation.

*Community Summaries* includes individual summaries of the research findings in each community. The individual community sections outline local issues, recent trends, local resources, and community-based strategies.

*Provincial Recommendations and Next Steps* provide suggested points of action for communities across BC, drawing upon the “best practices” identified in the Prince George court cases and other strategies that can be applied to any community in BC.

In the *Appendices* we have provided further documents from the research, including the question guides and other useful tools.

## **Glossary of Terms**

This brief glossary of terms is intended to provide definitions for terms that readers may not be familiar with, including phrases that may hold meaning within a specific community context.

### **Track**

“Track” is an expression used to describe an area where street-level prostitution takes place, generally a particular area of the city or stretch of road.

### **Stroll**

“Stroll” is similar to “track” and is used to describe an area where street-level prostitution takes place.

### **Pimps**

“Pimps” are men, women or youth who have sex workers or sexually exploited youth working under their direction, supervision or control. Pimps benefit financially from their control or supervision of the people working under them, and may provide drugs, alcohol, clothing, affection, shelter or protection in exchange. Pimps may also be the boyfriends or sexual partners of the sex worker or sexually exploited youth.

### **Johns**

“Johns” are people who purchase sexual services from sex workers. In the case of sexually exploited youth, “johns” are also called “offenders” or “abusers”, in recognition of the fact that sexually exploited youth are abused through their involvement in the sex trade.

### **Sexually exploited youth**

“Sexually exploited youth” are individuals under the age of 18 who are sexually abused through the exchange of sexual acts for drugs, food, shelter, other basics of life, and/or money.

### **Adult sex workers**

“Adult sex workers” are individuals over the age of 18 who exchange sexual acts for drugs, food, shelter, money, transportation or other goods or services.

### **Experiential youth / experiential adults**

The term “experiential” is used to describe individuals who have experience being sexually exploited as a youth or working in the sex trade as an adult. Experiential people may or may not be currently involved in the sex trade.

## **Section A: Project overview and background**

### **Goals and Purpose**

This research project had the following goals:

- increase our understanding of the violence experienced by these youth and adults and to increase their ability to report crimes safely
- increase the capacities of agencies and communities that work with sexually exploited youth and adult sex trade workers to create solutions to community issues, and to create lasting relationships between youth, service providers and researchers in BC
- increase the knowledge of professionals, including victim service workers, who deliver services to marginalized youth and adults and who can assist and support them as they move through the justice system, about the violence experienced and the barriers to reporting
- understand the ways in which systemic factors (such as within the legal system, social services, First Nations band systems and educational system) impact experiences of violence, and how service providers, decision makers and other community members can learn from these experiences to make communities safer
- better understand the relationship between colonization, violence and prostitution in B.C.'s Aboriginal communities

The research served an additional purpose for the communities that participated, providing an opportunity to assess the current community capacity and to develop a basis upon which to create a community plan for addressing violence in the lives of sexually exploited youth and adult sex workers.

For the community of Prince George, this project provided an opportunity to reflect on several recent court cases with sexually exploited youth victims in which there were successful convictions of the accused pimps or johns. These cases serve as examples of “best practices” from which other communities can learn and build upon in their own work with victims.

### **Sexual Exploitation and Adult Sex Work**

For the purposes of this research, we discussed the experiences of both youth and adults, but recognize the important distinction between sexually exploited youth and adult sex workers. The sexual exploitation of children and youth is abuse and is inherently exploitative. Adult sex workers can also be exploited due to poverty, abuse of power, violence and other factors. Additionally, it is important to see the different positions of power occupied by survival sex workers and those who are working in the adult sex industry with greater degrees of agency and consent. This research aims to work against all forms of violence, coercion and exploitation of both youth and adults, in the various ways that they are involved in sexual exploitation and the sex trade.

## **Guiding Questions**

The question guides were developed by the researchers with the help of the project advisory committee, and these guides were then used as a starting place for the community advisories. The question guides and other documents were also reviewed by the JIBC Ethics Review Committee to ensure ethical conduct. A set of guiding principles were used as a reference throughout this process, gathered from past research conducted with sexually exploited youth (see Appendix). Youth and experiential adults also provided input in to the question guides and made important changes to their wording and focus.

## **Community Advisory Committees**

In this community-based participatory research project, we were interested in working closely with community agencies and individuals who had particular knowledge of violence in their communities. This was achieved through establishing community advisory committees in each research location consisting of front-line workers, Community Action Team members, and others working on issues of sexual exploitation of children and youth and adult sex work. The advisory committees were established largely through networking and word of mouth, with the JIBC researchers sending out an invitation to meetings as needed throughout the research process. The advisory committees had the following responsibilities:

- Review question guides and recommend changes
- Establish community goals or outcomes for the research
- Establish the best method for contacting youth and experiential adults for participation in focus groups and/or individual interviews
- Identify key informants within the community and ensure a wide scope of experiences will be represented
- Set up focus groups and interviews with the researchers
- Participate in interviews as key informants, where appropriate
- Provide post-interview support for youth and experiential adults who participated, including debriefing and counseling
- Given an opportunity to provide feedback on final community report and make recommendations for next steps and priorities for community action

## **The Role of Local Youth**

Youth, both experiential and non-experiential, also played an important role in the research process. They participated in the following ways:

- Provided feedback on the questionnaires and changed them to be more accessible and youth-friendly
- Participated in youth focus groups and individual interviews to speak to their experiences
- Given an opportunity to provide feedback on the report and recommendations either with the researchers or front-line workers who sat on the community advisories

## **The Role of Experiential Adults**

Adults who had past or present experience working in the sex trade or being sexually exploited as youth were central to the research process. In a similar way to youth, experiential adults contributed in these ways:

- Provided feedback on the questionnaires and made recommendations to make them more accessible
- Participated in focus groups and individual interviews to speak to their experiences
- Provide feedback on the report and recommendations either with the researchers or support workers who sat on the community advisories

## **Who Was Interviewed?**

Several types of interviews were held to gather local information for the research:

- Focus groups and individual interviews with key informants, local front-line workers and others who could speak to experiences of violence and the justice system
- Focus groups with youth who were not necessarily experiential but were identified by advisory committee members as willing and able to speak to violence in the lives of local youth (participants were not asked to self-identify or to speak about their own individual experiences of sexual exploitation, if relevant)
- Individual interviews with experiential youth who wanted to speak more to their own experiences
- Focus groups and individual interviews with adults who had worked in the sex trade

Experiential adults and youth participants were paid \$20 (or \$10 per hour) for their participation in the interviews and their contribution to reviewing and changing the question guides and report.

Key informants included representatives from a range of sectors including: justice system representatives such as RCMP and Crown Counsel; Victim Services staff; front-line staff from transition houses and women's centres; representatives from First Nations bands, Aboriginal health centres, and other Aboriginal service providers; health services such as needle exchanges, street-level health services, and drop-in clinics; sexual assault and trauma counselors; youth workers; youth probation; youth treatment facilities, and; representatives of sex worker organizations.

## **Reflections on the Research Process**

Community-based research can be a long process, and this particular project took more than two years from beginning to end. One of the challenges of doing this type of research is maintaining interest and consistency of community representatives on the community advisories. Over the two-year period, many organizations faced changes in staffing or program cuts and found it challenging to stay connected to the project. However, in each community, a core group of people remained involved in the research process and were able to provide feedback on the final report. This type of long-term involvement lead to the development of strengthened community networks and, in some



cases, a renewed commitment to moving forward with “next steps” for addressing violence in the local community.

The research process was different in each community, building on the needs of the local advisory committee members and participants. In rural areas of BC there is a great need for building capacity and knowledge around the issue of sexual exploitation and violence, and this research played an important role in bringing people together around the issue. For example, in the northern community of Hazelton, Melanie Mark was hired to provide additional educational workshops to the community through the connections she made while doing interviews for this research. For other communities, such as Campbell River, the research process drew from pre-existing networks formed through the local Community Action Team, which already met on a regular basis. The research will hopefully bring some new information to communities such as these to strengthen and support future initiatives.

One additional outcome of conducting research in rural communities was connecting with youth and community workers who may feel isolated as they try to do work around these issues. By beginning a dialogue and helping them to feel that they are not alone in their struggles, the research process will have a lasting impact. The researchers were able to provide information on available sources of funding, training and the annual provincial forum, which will all strengthen prevention and intervention initiatives on a local level.

## Statistical Information for Research Participants

A total of 110 people from across BC were interviewed for this research project. The participants identified in the chart below include adults who have experience in the sex trade, as well as both experiential and non-experiential youth. In addition to the information provided below, 49 key informants were interviewed, with a handful of them identifying as experiential. Key informants did not complete statistics forms so this information is not available for these participants.

<b>Participants: youth and experiential adults (does not include key informants)</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Adults</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	43	18
<b>DOB 1950-1959</b>		2
<b>DOB 1960-1969</b>		6
<b>DOB 1970-1979</b>		7
<b>DOB 1980-1989</b>	33	
<b>DOB 1990-1999</b>	10	
<b>Born in BC</b>	35	8
<b>Born elsewhere in Canada</b>	7	4
<b>Born outside of Canada</b>	1	2
<b>College/university</b>		1
<b>Grade 12</b>	4	6
<b>Grade 11</b>	3	1
<b>Grade 10</b>	11	3
<b>Grade 9</b>	11	1
<b>Grade 8 and below</b>	15	2
<b>Male</b>	12	
<b>Female</b>	31	16
<b>Transgender</b>		2*
<b>Straight</b>	33	11
<b>Gay</b>	1	
<b>Lesbian</b>		
<b>Bisexual</b>	6	3
<b>Two-spirit</b>	1**	
<b>First Nations</b>	28***	4***
<b>Métis</b>	2	
<b>White</b>	8	7
<b>Visible Minority</b>	2****	
<b>Mixed Race</b>	6	2
<p><b>NOTES:</b> Not all of the stats forms were completely filled in. This information includes what the participants offered.            *Both Transgender adults were MTF transsexuals.            ** Two-spirit youth also identified as male.            *** Identified First Nations included Nisga'a, Gitxan, Cree, Iroquois, and Dene.            **** Visible minority participants included Haitian and mixed African American ancestry.</p>		

## Section B: Provincial Overview

This section provides a provincial overview looking at overall themes that emerged during our discussions with youth, adult sex workers, and key informants across BC. While the community summaries will focus on local issues, this overview is intended to make connections between communities in BC through identifying common issues and experiences. It also speak to the general issue of violence against sexually exploited youth and sex workers in BC, as most of the people we interviewed reported similar experiences of violence, similar methods of dealing with this violence, and similar barriers to accessing the justice system.

This research project aimed to look more closely at the specific issues facing rural communities. The researchers made efforts to interview people in both larger urban areas such as Victoria and Kamloops as well as the surrounding rural communities of Sooke, Chase and Merritt. Through focusing on the movement of youth and adults between rural and urban areas, we hoped to gather information that would provide insights in to the hidden nature of sexual exploitation in rural communities and suggestions for creating change in areas where there may be few resources and no programs directly serving those involved in the sex trade.

Prince George was an important research site, as the community has had several successful court cases involving sexually exploited youth victims. Interviews were held with people who worked closely on these cases in the hopes that other communities in BC can benefit from their successes and lessons they learned along the way. As one participant in Prince George said, “It’s really not that hard but the system makes it hard. If the goal is to have more successful cases, get the supports and the resources in place because as wonderful of a community that Prince George is in terms of the professionals and level of commitment and compassion, I know that there are people like us in every community.”

### Focus on Violence

#### First experiences of violence

The vast majority of the participants in the research reported that the first experiences of violence in the lives of sexually exploited youth and sex workers happens during childhood, usually in the home. Sexual abuse by parents and other family members was commonly linked with entering in to more formal types of exploitation. While several key informants spoke of youth who end up being recruited in to sexual exploitation without a past history of violence or abuse, they were sure to note that in their years of front-line experience these cases were very minimal.

*I started prostitution after my step-father kept paying me for my services...I figured if he paid for sex, other men would. So that's how I started when I was fifteen.*  
-experiential adult

## Scope of violence

Types of violence reported by participants included:

Emotional abuse

- Belittling, calling you names, putting you down
- Yelling at you
- Threatening with physical harm, threatening with violence toward your family
- Controlling your movement, who you can talk to, what you can wear

Physical abuse

- Biting
- Hitting, kicking
- Stabbing
- Drugging you against your will
- Throwing objects at you
- Tying or locking you up (kidnapping)
- Murder

General harm

- Being forced to do something you don't want to do
- Anything that hurts you
- Invading your own boundaries, coming in to your comfort zone

## Where violence happens

Generally participants reported that violence is a regular part of daily life and can happen “anywhere, anytime”. While some youth and street-involved individuals reported experiencing violence on the street or in public places, the majority of participants said that violence is more likely to happen in private places. Generally, adult perpetrators are more afraid of being seen or caught by police or other bystanders, while youth seem to have less fear of committing violent acts in a public place.

Public spaces include:

- Malls
- Street corners
- Alleys
- Schools
- Parks

Private places include:

- Hotel rooms
- Cars and vans
- Houses
- Trick pads
- Escort agencies

## Movement Between Communities

Many of the experiential adults we interviewed talked about moving between cities in Alberta and BC, both as youth and adults working in the sex trade. Participants talked about getting fed up with cycles of addiction, violence and desperation, and moving from town to town trying to find a

*I've had this pattern of running and trying to run away from drugs but I always run into the same people. I mean I could spot you a mile away if you're a drug addict so and wherever I went I was still there and my problems came with me.*  
-experiential adult

way to make a fresh start. However, without any resources or connections in those new communities, they ended up needing to score drugs and working the street once again. Many participants had worked in the sex trade in different cities, moving between Campbell River, Nanaimo, Kamloops, Kelowna, Vancouver, Calgary and other places. Violence was frequently a part of this instability, as they found themselves in a new city with nowhere to stay and no knowledge of the local area.

### **Aboriginal Communities**

Aboriginal communities face particular challenges in dealing with violence and sexual exploitation. In communities across BC, youth and adults talked about experiences of intergenerational violence, abuse and silence within their families. People who have spoken out against their abusers, whether it be a sibling, parent, grandparent, or member of their community, have frequently found themselves to be blamed and ostracized for “breaking the silence”. Aboriginal communities in northern and rural regions face particular challenges, as there is little privacy or confidentiality when trying to reach out for help. Breaking the cycle of violence seems impossible for many Aboriginal people for whom abuse has become normalized. Native people also face heightened rates of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE), poverty and other factors which make violence particularly difficult to escape.

### **Use of Technology**

With increased use of mobile phones and the internet, sexually exploited youth are more available to predators. Youth themselves are also using the internet to “text message” threats to one another. Participants in the research recommended that strategies be developed to catch up to youth in their use of technology and tackle the particular challenges that are posed by technology in the form of distance threats of violence, luring, deception and recruitment. One positive impact of the increased use of cell phones is that the youth are also more likely to get ahold of youth workers when they are in crisis and can be reached more easily by service providers.

### **Violence and Recruitment**

Many key informants talked about violence and sexual assault being used as a tool of recruitment. In particular, youth who come from rural areas or small towns to centers such as Victoria or Prince George may have left home for the promise of excitement, opportunity and a better life in the city. However, they may encounter similar kinds of violence as they did at home and may lack the “street smarts” and knowledge of resources needed to survive in this new environment. Participants talked about several cases of young girls being raped or assaulted during their first few days downtown, which then spiraled in to a dependence on a “boyfriend” or group of friends for protection, often entrenching them in sexual exploitation and street life.

*I was introduced to alcohol and drugs when I was about thirteen years old which was a result of a gang rape that happened to me by five guys who were all eighteen years old. I was in grade eight so I was thirteen and I woke up an alcoholic the next day basically. That's how it started.*  
--experiential adult

### **Location and agency**

Participants also discussed the perception that escort agencies and private places, such as their own home or the home of a friend, were safer than other places. This is especially true for adults working in the sex trade at a higher level, who are not dealing with drug addictions, are not street involved, are fairly high functioning and who work at the higher end of the sex trade managing their own “business”. However, indoor venues are often actually more dangerous, especially for youth, because they are hidden and provide another layer of vulnerability. Outreach workers and others who work with sexually exploited youth know that the levels of violence for youth who go to “parties” at remote houses are extreme, and that the chances of reporting this violence is slim.

### **Who are the perpetrators of the violence?**

There are many layers of violence in the lives of most of the experiential youth and adults we spoke with. Many of them have experienced violence at the hands of people they are close to, including their own family members (parents, siblings, step-parents, foster parents, etc), their boyfriends, close friends, and members of their own street community. Adult women reported that it was quite common to be beaten by their pimps or boyfriends for not meeting their “quota” for the night. An additional layer of violence is perpetrated against them by rival gang members, pimps, strangers, and johns or tricks. Most sexually exploited youth face violence at the hands of men who are much older than them—“tricks” or “boyfriends” are rarely their peers. Some participants also experienced violence at the hands of police. They also discussed the reality that some of their abusers are in positions of power in their community, such as police, lawyers, judges, teachers, and First Nations chiefs.

### **Who is targeted?**

Heightened levels of violence are faced by women, people with mental health issues, people with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) or Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE), people who are addicted to drugs, disabled people, and children. Specifically, key informants reported that many Aboriginal youth who are sexually exploited have FAS/FAE and are extremely vulnerable to violence, as well as to the controlling factors of drug and alcohol addiction.

Participants across BC reported an increase in the numbers of youth who are being groomed in to sexual exploitation through offering them free drugs at parties (often at the homes of older men). Once the youth become addicted and run up drug debts, they are threatened and told that they have to pay off their debt somehow. Violence is often a large part of these threats, which then contribute to the youth to being sexually exploited. Participants also talked about older men targeting youth who are quiet, isolated, possibly visibly affected by FAS/FAE, and lacking affection or attention.

### **Short-term effects**

The short-term effects of violence include:

- Physical effects: Immediate disease, illness, injury, bruising, inability to walk, death
- Emotional effects: numbing out, dissociation, incredible stress and upheaval, crying, suicidality, self-harming,

- Mental effects: lack of self-esteem, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, alolia (difficulty speaking, inability to speak)
- Addiction: violence often results in victims using more drugs or alcohol to escape the pain of the violence and to “numb out”
- Basic needs: violence often leads to a lack of ability to work, to get food and shelter,
- Relational: depending on who the perpetrator is, violence can result in a disconnection from your support system

### **Long-term effects**

Many participants talked about always being on guard, living with a heightened awareness of the levels of threat in any given moment. The effects of this were said to remain through a person’s entire life because eventually “you don’t feel it anymore – it becomes normalized.” This sentiment was expressed in every community we visited: violence becomes an expected part of daily life, and is seen as “normal” in both personal relationships and in society. As well, sexually exploited youth often come to equate sex with pain rather than with affection.

Long-term effects also include the elements of mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. Mental health issues were reported as one long-term effect of violence in every community, including depression, claustrophobia, multiple personality disorder, and addictions. Common long-term health effects include contracting HIV/AIDS and Hep C. This also intersects with increased drug use, especially with Crystal meth and cocaine, which can result in long-term cognitive psychotic illnesses.

Intergenerational violence and abuse were also reported as a long-term effect of violence and substance use, as well as experiential youth becoming parents to kids that have FAS/FAE, and more kids going in to care.

### **Small Town Stigma**

In smaller communities such as Campbell River and Kamloops, there are long-term repercussions for being visible on the street as a sex worker or sexually exploited youth. It is nearly impossible to go through exiting and recovery in the same town in which you once worked, as the stigma and labels are so strongly ingrained. Several participants did stay in the same town in which they used to work, but they remain involved as advocates for sex workers. Finding employment is one of the main challenges facing those who try to exit the sex trade in the town in which they worked. It is also common for families to be entrenched in the trade, making youth in certain families vulnerable to recruitment and leaving them few options.

### **What makes you feel safe?**

- Self-empowerment, being in my own power,
- Staying off drugs, staying “straight”
- Knowledge and experience dealing with scary situations
- Being known by others around you
- Having a spotter
- Having a cell phone

- Having a boyfriend to protect me
- Knowing my friends are close by

### **What puts you at risk of violence?**

- Being ignorant about how to take care of yourself
- Not trusting your instincts
- Not being aware of your surroundings, particularly when using drugs or alcohol
- Being in a dark or hidden place (such as an alley)
- Knowing no one will hear you if you scream (such as at a party in the woods)
- Drug debts
- Not making your “quota” for the day (if you have a pimp or someone managing you)

### **Impact of crystal meth**

The desperation created by an increased use of crystal meth in communities across BC (even in smaller communities such as Terrace, Merritt and Campbell River) has resulted in lower capacities for self-protection. Participants reported that crystal meth users are willing to put up with almost anything to get more drugs and that they are unaware of what is happening to them when they are using. A great sense of urgency surrounds this change, especially where the increased use has “take over” and infiltrated every level of the community, creating a frenzied feeling amongst experiential youth, adults and service providers.

### **Self-protection and self-care**

Many participants said that there are huge differences in the levels of self-protection between youth and adults, and between people who are part of the street community and those who are not. Adult sex workers have a greater degree of self-awareness, knowledge of risk factors, and ability to get out of potentially dangerous situations. While youth may think they are safer in certain contexts, many participants said that youth don’t know how to assess safety and really don’t think about it as much as the adults do. Similarly, street culture and the effects of drug addiction (especially crystal meth) allow for a greater degree of vulnerability to violence and normalization of violence.

Despite these trends, every community reported some degree of self-care. Self-protection and self care strategies included:

- Knowing your surroundings, knowing how to protect yourself
- Carrying a weapon (even a pen can be used in an emergency)
- Knowledge and experience (knowing your clients)
- Having options
- Thinking of the consequences of your choices before you put them in to action
- Pampering yourself: taking a bubble bath,
- Getting support, calling a friend,
- Doing things to keep yourself busy, such as reading or cleaning the house



## Focus on Formal and Informal Supports

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### First reports of violence

Participants reported that victims of violence often do not tell anyone about the crimes against them, due to shame, fear or a normalization of violence. If they do tell someone, it may be a close friend, parent, or long-term support person from a community agency.

The exception to this may be youth who are not entrenched in sexual exploitation and adults who are working at the higher end of the sex trade. Youth who are being groomed in to a more “glamorous” idea of working as an escort may be shocked at the level of violence and may report to a family member or police. Similarly, sex workers who have a greater degree of agency and support may report crimes against them, although the criminal nature of their work may prevent them from doing so. Some participants spoke of youth who were “scared straight” by the violence against them, and after a particularly violent incident they got help to exit and heal from the experience.

### Importance of relationships

For many youth, their youth worker or other community worker is the only healthy person in their life. With intergenerational abuse and other factors, they may be unfamiliar with what a healthy relationship looks like. It is therefore essential that youth be given an opportunity to develop these trusting relationships over the long-term and that they be unconditional. Many youth keep in contact with a counselor or youth worker as they cycle in and out of street involvement, drug use and other ups and downs. These types of supportive environments make it easier for youth to disclose abuse or violence.

### Community programs and support

While experiential youth and adults are most likely to report violence against them to workers with whom they already have a trusting relationship, fears about losing services or being reported to authority figures may prevent them from disclosing abuse. For youth who feel happy with their current housing situation or involvement in certain programs, they may fear negative repercussions for telling anyone about being sexually exploited or abused. Many experiential adults feel similarly fearful of going to authority figures in incidents of abuse because they worry that they will have their children taken away or will be at risk of losing their housing.

## Focus on Reporting Violence and Getting a Conviction

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### Barriers to reporting violence

Overall, very few of those interviewed said that sexually exploited youth or adult sex workers would choose to report a violent crime to the police. Individuals that did say they would report said they would only do so if a child’s safety was at risk, or if they were absolutely certain that they were going to die if they did not report. Even in situations where individuals were beaten so badly that they almost died or were left for dead, most did not want to talk to the police.

*I think you would have to have a gun at me. You have a gun, then I will go to the police. But no I don't go to the police because the number one street rule, you don't rat.*  
-experiential adult

In all of the communities, we found several key barriers that prevent victims from reporting crimes against them to the police or even to outreach workers, counselors and other formal support networks.

- Fear of being labeled a rat
- Fear of organized crime
- Fear of being disbelieved
- Discrepancy between amount of social and economic power or status held by the victim and their assailant, often heightened in the lives of Aboriginal victims
- History of being in court as an accused: many victims have been prosecuted in courts for minor offences and then develop long record for breaching the conditions of their probation
- Having a warrant out for their arrest
- Not knowing what the prostitution laws are, not knowing their rights, and fearing they will be told “this is just part of the job”.
- Knowing someone who has gone to the police for help in the past and who has been told there is not enough information to press charges or has been blamed themselves for the violence against them
- Having a history of drug use causes people to think the police will treat them badly because they are seen as “junkies”

### **Barriers to successful convictions**

Participants reported several barriers that can be present during a court case, either within the justice system or in the lives of the victims:

- Gap in understanding between youth’s lives and those who are in the court system (middle class frameworks of probation officers, lawyers, judges, who then expect the youth to live up to their expectations and class standards)
- Drug and alcohol are used as coping mechanisms during court case, partly due to a lack of available detox and treatment facilities, and lack of support to access those services. The victims may not have other ways to cope and lack the resources to develop those coping mechanisms.
- Mental health issues, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) or Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE), intersecting with drug use, trauma
- Expectations that the youth will be in the same room as the accused
- Lack of support though the court process to ensure victims show up, are not threatened or further hurt by friends of the accused

### **Jurisdictional barriers**

It was expressed many times that with the numbers of girls and women missing, hurt and murdered across this province and in Alberta, investigations should be undertaken to examine these trends across provincial borders. Due to jurisdictional issues not only between provinces but also between police precincts, investigations may not look at larger trends or make connections between various cases. Some of the women who had worked on the streets in British Columbia, Alberta and other provinces, traveling between small towns and big cities, talked about the ease with which predators can drive around hurting sex workers without any consequences.

### **Role of Police**

Most of the participants reported that an emphasis should be put on creating stronger relationships between police and youth, and police and sex trade workers. Although some communities have programs that bring police in to schools to talk to youth, many “at-risk” youth only talk to the police when they are in trouble. By creating a stronger presence in the community, building informal relationships and familiarity, and being available, victims may feel more comfortable reporting to police. Some effective measures included linking victims with the police through a support worker who physically took the victim to the police station and stayed with them through the entire reporting process. Virtually all victims of crime will need to go through the police procedures to make a report, so this is a critical relationship to address in removing barriers.

Police across British Columbia (BC) are taking measures to track sex trade workers or address sexual exploitation in their community. Each jurisdiction has its own strategy and own initiatives. Police from across the province were happy to speak to us about their programs and many of them have had great success building relationships either with experiential youth and adults or with the front-line workers who may receive reports of violence informally. One key relationship is between the police and youth support workers, as the youth will trust the judgment of their worker and may be more likely to go to a police officer who has a good reputation with their worker.

## **Section C: Community Summaries**

The following community summaries are intended to provide an overview of pressing community issues, emerging trends around types or levels of violence, community relationship building, and other issues that are relevant to the local community.

# Victoria

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## 1. Local Issues

**Recent trends** included an increase in swarmings and other attacks involving one victim and several assailants, particularly amongst female youth. The adult sex workers reported witnessing a rise in youth violence and a lack of peer support between youth who are being sexually exploited. The adults talked about taking care of one another more than the experiential youth, which was mirrored in the youth interviews. Another local trend can be seen in an increase service use by youth who have intergenerational family involvement in the sex trade and street life.

*Just the invincibility of youth themselves. They will take chance that an adult sex trade worker won't.*  
-key informant

### **Red-zoning**

Youth participants reported that they had been “red-zoned” from downtown as a condition of their probation. They said that although this may be seen as a protective measure to keep them away from street life in the downtown core, it may also serve to keep them away from services such as outreach, youth clinics, free food and other things that would support them in difficult times. Front-line workers, however, said that “red zoning” is not as large an issue as it has been in previous years. Other key informants said that there are inconsistencies in the enforcement of probation conditions, and that violent young men face few consequences for their actions due to the lack of enforcement.

### **Racism**

Racially motivated violence was discussed by many participants, including violence between groups of First Nations and non-First Nations girls. The youth and experiential adults also talked about expecting violence from men of specific racial and ethnic groups, including gangs from racial minority communities. One case involved a john who was a member of an ethnic minority and was known for violently beating young girls that he picked up as tricks. The offences contributed to an increased fear of men perceived to be of that racial background. During the course of the research, one such man was charged with violent offenses and key informants expressed relief that he was off the street.

### **City Ports**

Many of the participants talked about the significant changes that happen when sailors are in Victoria. The adult sex workers saw their presence as an increased opportunity to make money but also a marker as heightened violence. Street-involved youth similarly recognized their arrival as cause for heightened security measures, needing to travel in groups to decrease vulnerability and not provoke the sailors. Sailors come in to town for recreation, which may include drinking, and can lead to an increase in sex work and sexual exploitation.

## **Movement between Western Communities and Victoria**

In the outlying areas, a lot of youth are quite mobile and tend to “fall off the radar screen”. This is similar to Aboriginal youth who may have no fixed address or move between family members. This kind of mobility makes it difficult for youth to keep in contact with youth workers and other supports, especially because the mandates of many programs are limited to a specific region. As well the work of police may be limited to their jurisdiction and key informants reported that some cases do not get the attention they should because it is unclear which jurisdiction the case falls in to. Victoria does have a regional police officer working on issues of sexual exploitation, however, which works to decrease problems with working across jurisdictions.

In recent years the “stroll” has been pushed in to industrial areas or out of public visibility. There is no set place where sexually exploited youth can be found, as most youth become involved at parties especially in the Western Communities, Sooke and other outlying areas. Participants said that “suburbia” and more rural parts of Victoria can hide sexual exploitation very well because often the abuse takes place at parties or other “social” events that may look normal to most people.

These areas have also had a recent increase in

population density without a corresponding increase in youth or outreach services.

Service providers talked about young girls who get to be known in the party circuit and get invited to “work” at parties throughout the Western Communities, where they face violence and abuse on a regular basis. One common feeling amongst participants was that the girls see this as different from the sex trade because it isn’t happening on the street and there is a certain degree of familiarity with the people hosting the parties. As well, the young women often attach a high status for being popular at these parties. Key informants reported one specific case in which a group of men have been exploiting girls for more than 10 years out of the same location in the Western Communities; the police have tried to intervene but have been unable to put a stop to it.

*They’re getting free Meth but they have to sleep with creepy old guys...they don’t see it as anything wrong. If they were standing on a corner they would perceive that as being exploited.*

-key informant

Key informants reported that the hidden nature of sexual exploitation has created a level of denial amongst parents and service providers that problems usually associated with downtown street culture (such as the use of crystal meth, gang activity, violence, and sex work) exists in the Western Communities. Recruiting in the Western Communities, Sooke and other outlying areas happens in spaces that are supposedly “safe” for children and youth, such as schoolyards and malls. Recruitment happens through other youth as well as their older friends. For this reason, the entire community should be involved in addressing sexual exploitation, including at schools, at the mall, at the community pool and anywhere there may be predators.

## Organized Crime

Many key informants noticed a big change in the organization of visible youth sexual exploitation. With less activity from such organized crime as the West Coast Players and other groups, the involvement of youth in the sex trade has become less organized and has gone further underground.

## Street Youth and Street Culture

Street youth that we interviewed saw a very significant distinction between themselves and non-street youth who are being sexually exploited. These distinctions are mirrored in the separation between services for street youth and non-street youth, with few services targeted at the street population. Living on the street provides a certain degree of security in having a “street family” and being protected against violence from people who are not part of that family. The cost, however, is facing violence from your own boyfriend or friends, especially where drugs and alcohol are involved. The street youth we talked to used the few services available to them in Victoria (including Out of the Rain shelter, street nurses and the Y Outreach Van) and most said that they would feel comfortable talking about abuse with one of the outreach workers or street nurses.

*Everybody that I know from the street, we're all family like whether we are blood or not because that's our safety net. We keep ourselves safe because we are together and when you're together in a tight group nobody bothers you. So safety in numbers I guess.*  
-key informant

## 2. Aboriginal and Cross-cultural Issues

Aboriginal youth are more likely to face intergenerational violence, which leads to silencing and heightened levels of ostracization within the family and community. Participants talked about Aboriginal youth being more tolerant of violence and less likely to report or disclose abuse. Additionally, many Aboriginal youth see it as normal to be in “the system”, through intergenerational child apprehension, poverty and unemployment.

First Nations youth may leave a reserve on Vancouver Island or in other areas of British Columbia, and may come to Victoria to get away from the violence. Additionally, many Aboriginal youth move between reserves in the Victoria area (which can themselves be isolated from the larger network of support services in the area) and the downtown core. These youth may face barriers to accessing youth services in Victoria, as well as on the reserve or in their home community. Aboriginal youth from outside of the area often find themselves alone in downtown Victoria without any formal support systems in place, making them particularly vulnerable.

Youth from immigrant and visible minority youth represent a small minority of youth accessing support services in Victoria and area. These youth may connect with support services through their involvement in the justice system (as offenders) but key informants reported a lack of access from racially and culturally marginalized youth.

### **3. Individual experiences of safety and violence**

#### **Impact of Socio-economic Background**

Key Informants reported that very few sexually exploited youth in their programs are from well-off “normal” families. Two workers with seven years experience running programs for sexually exploited youth in Victoria said that only three of their clients were from “normal” families. Participants felt these numbers were reflective of the heightened risk that youth from poor families face, as well as the ability of well-off families to hire consultants for their children rather than put them in programs. Key informants said that in some ways wealthy families are at a disadvantage when dealing with the court system because they don’t have as much knowledge and are less prepared for the reality of the court process.

#### **Creating Greater Safety**

Many of the adult sex workers said that the programs run by PEERS (Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resource Society) and other non-judgmental resources increase their levels of safety. The outreach van, drop in centre and other programs provide places for sex workers to get help or find support when it’s necessary. As well, PEERS offers programs that help sex workers to build their skill levels even while working, as clients do not have to be “exiting” in order to access. Having a long-term presence in the community with ads in the “escort” section of the local paper was said to increase their likelihood to access PEERS because they could see their long-term commitment to the community. This is especially true for men who have few services available to them when trying to exit or seek supports.

#### **Street smarts**

Many participants had innovative ways of keeping themselves safer or giving themselves an increased sense of safety while working. This included being aware of what everyday objects could be used as a weapon (such as keys, a pen, stilettos), having a cell phone to call 911, and even taking measures such as asking dates to empty their pockets and checking under the seat of the car. One participant said that they look at the key chain of the john and know that if there is only one key, it is a rental car and is less safe. Measures such as spitting on the floor of the car were mentioned in order to leave DNA behind in case a violent act occurred

#### **Exiting**

Participants talked about some of the ways that youth and adults “exit”, including purposefully getting pregnant in order to start a family and a new life. Service providers talked about seeing several young women who have in fact exited successfully through having their own children and focusing their attention on creating a safe home for their child. Key informants reported that it is particularly difficult for young men to exit the sex trade, and more services are needed to support this population.

#### **Bad Date Sheets**

Participants said that bad date sheets are only used to report extreme cases of violence. Most sex workers don’t report getting slapped or punched to the bad date sheet. They



only see extreme violence as worthy of reporting to this informal community peer-support tool. As well, only individuals who are accessing services would have access to the bad date sheet.

### **Protecting Other Workers**

Some adult sex workers said that they would go to the police if they felt their life was in danger because they wanted to protect other street workers from being victimized. This was said in light of the Pickton case and the knowledge that one person could not only hurt them but dozens of others as well.

### **Involvement with the Justice System**

Most sexually exploited youth and adult sex workers have very little knowledge about what rights they have and what the justice system can do for them. Many of them have knowledge of the court system from the perspective of a perpetrator or from having gone through family court. Key informants also discussed examples of taking youth to the police to report crimes against them and feeling that they have been “brushed off” or not taken seriously enough, particularly if they have been known to use drugs or alcohol in the past. These experiences make them less likely to turn to the justice system for help. Key informants talked about the impact of the loss of Crown Victim Services, and the need to bridge this gap in victim support.

Youth who have warrants out for their arrest or who are in violation of their parole cannot go to police or they will be arrested themselves. One youth participant reported calling the police because a man was overdosing downtown and said that she was in turn put in YCC for breaching the conditions of her probation by being downtown. Her “good deed” was not recognized and instead she was punished, which discouraged her from going to the police in the future. Additionally, youth who are involved with the justice system and have a probation officer often face difficulties when the relationship is severed after the terms of their probation have been met.

### **Silencing**

Some youth who live at home and go to school keep their sexual exploitation very hidden. They are at greater risk because of the silence around the abuse they are facing. As well, an abuser may use the threat of telling their parents about their involvement in the sex trade against them, thereby keeping them in violent situations.

### **Gender differences**

Adult sex workers talked about women’s ability to share information and take care of one another while male sex workers tend to keep to themselves. Male sex trade workers are more likely to work alone and to be more isolated, with fewer supports to access. As one male sex worker said “when a woman is assaulted she can go to a transition house. I can’t go to a transition house...where can I go to get away?”

### **Violence between Women and Youth**

Participants reported that female recruiters are often more violent, or as violent, as men. As one service provider said, men use relationships to control while females use fear to

control. This creates a problem for service providers in finding safe housing for violent young women who may also be sexually exploited. The problem remains as to where to house female recruiters? There are several programs in place to deal with these types of situations between girls, including the Boys and Girls Club, but more are needed.

### **Reporting violent crimes**

Participants had misconceptions about who lays charges in the court system, and whose role it is to decide whether or not a case proceeds through the court system.<sup>1</sup> It was expressed that the judge will charge the offender with a lesser charge (such as exploitation rather than sexual abuse) where possible. These experiences take the power out of the hands of victims and put the consequences in the hands of the justice system, which sex workers and sexually exploited youth usually have very little faith in. Victims do not feel that the justice system will protect them or seek justice on their behalf. They therefore feel helpless and doubt that they will have a positive outcome from reporting.

## **4. Legal system**

For many sexually exploited youth and adult sex workers, there is a strong link between familial violence they faced during childhood, and their involvement in or experience with the criminal justice system. When youth go to the police for help as children and continue to face abuse at home, they are less likely to feel they can go to the police in the future. Many youth and service providers reported feeling hopeless and thinking that “the system is a joke” because no charges will be laid against their abusers. Additionally, young women may become involved in being sexually exploited outside the home as a result of facing similar violence within the home. The following is a case study to illustrate some of these connections.

### **Case Study: Female Youth in Victoria**

One of the youth participants reported having been repeatedly physically abused by her step-father throughout her childhood and adolescence. She was often covered in bruises and when teachers at school asked her what had happened, she would make an excuse. At the age of 12 or 13, she finally fought back against her step-father and he, in turn, phoned the police on her. Both of them were charged in the incident. “My own step-father was charged and for all the shit he did he only got two years probation... And he actually charged me the first time I fought back,” she reported. The young woman was charged with mischief, the first charges ever brought against her, and she received probation as well as 20 days in custody. It was at this point that she started drinking heavily and became involved with older men, going to hotels, trading sexual favors for cocaine or money. She said that they would beat her up, but at least they would pay her.

*In one case I can think of, a deal was made and [the youth victims] weren't consulted on it. Just the impact of that was horrible you know because they totally felt abandoned and betrayed and had no faith in the justice system and so many youth don't. Especially really entrenched youth or street youth, they don't have any faith in the justice system.*  
-key informant

<sup>1</sup> Please see page 59 for clarification of the role of Crown Counsel in laying charges.

At one point, a “boyfriend” of hers from these parties beat her badly and the police questioned her about it. She said “I’ve been beaten up for like the past ten years and you’re going to sit there and say ‘oh, now we want to know who it is’?”. When she finally did tell the police who had beaten her up, they brought the man in for questioning and then let him go. He then beat her even more severely when she showed up for “work” that night. Later in life, this young woman was raped. She reported having a rape kit done but was not willing to talk to the police.

### **Successful Cases**

On the other hand, when victims have a team of support people to help them through the court process, some individuals do have a positive outcome. One successful case in Victoria involved a coordinated effort to support the youth over the one year period that it took to see the case through the court process. A probation officer, Crown Counsel, two outreach workers and a police officer all supported the youth to press charges and testify. She was able to use an assumed name to protect her identity and the case was successful in seeing a conviction.

Key informants in the Western Communities reported that during a three-year sexual exploitation court support program, six cases went to trial and only two resulted in convictions. Both of the accused got a “slap on the wrist”, according to the key informants who were involved in the cases. One pimp was ordered deported during this three-year period, which was an additional success. However the man died before he could leave the country.

## **6. Recommendations**

### **Continuity between Services**

Many of the service providers in Victoria and the Western Communities talked about a lack of work happening across jurisdictional boundaries. Police and service providers are often prevented from working with youth as they move between downtown Victoria and the outlying areas. More communication between organizations and police detachments in these jurisdictions would help to track the youth who are most mobile and most likely to fall through the cracks.

Sooke and other Western Communities have youth collective meetings on a regular basis including front line outreach and youth workers. This would be a good opportunity for networking across jurisdictions, sharing information about youth who may be moving between downtown Victoria and the outlying communities. As well, these meetings would allow for referrals between agencies in different areas of Victoria, which may be lacking under the current system. Key informants reported that by the end of the research process, more dialogue and information is being shared between front-line workers across these service areas than in the past.

### **Relationship with Local Police**

Key informants suggested that the creation of a special violence squad specifically dealing with sex workers and sexually exploited youth would go a long way to encouraging victims to come forward. Specialized police services and victim support is needed in order to meet the unique needs of sexually exploited youth victims. Female police officers should be the first point of contact for female victims who may be distrustful of men or who may be experiencing extreme trauma. Another element of this specialized group would be a support person or advocate who is also experiential in the sex trade. Additionally, specialized workers should be knowledgeable in working with male and transgendered sex workers and sexually exploited youth. Sensitivity training is one element of ensuring that police are equipped to build the necessary relationships with sexually exploited youth and sex workers.

*Police departments that have specific squads tend to have better relationships with sex trade workers and then are more likely to report. For the short period of time that we had a vice squad in Victoria, there was a very different relationship with police and sex trade workers.*

-key informant

### **Changes in the Media**

The media, including the newspapers, movie and television industries, need to address their portrayal of sex work. Sex workers are well aware of how they are portrayed as being either dirty addicts who are wasting their life on the street, or glamorous high class hookers living the high life. Attention should be given to media images that entice young girls in to leading a glamorous lifestyle with an edge that is exciting rather than dangerous. Images of dirty addicts on the streets are also misleading as the stereotypical representation of sex workers, as it leads girls to deny their exploitation if they are functioning at a higher level. Local newspaper and television reporters could learn from the work of Jody Paterson, a local reporter and new director of PEERS, as she could speak to the realities of both the media and sex work in the local community.

### **Public Awareness**

Participants said that an increased public acknowledgement of sexual exploitation in Victoria by the mayor and other officials would help to encourage local businesses and other members of the community to support efforts to address sexual exploitation.

# Campbell River

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## 1. Local Issues

In Campbell River, the smaller community creates a heightened vulnerability to groups that move in and start selling drugs or controlling sex workers. The power struggles between competing gangs or groups can result in a noticeable escalation in violence. None of the key informants in Campbell River reported knowing of male sex workers or boys being sexually exploited in that community, whereas that was not the case in Victoria. Some participants reported that the “stroll” in Campbell River has been moved over the years due to police and public pressure, and that it is only adults working in these areas. The sexual exploitation of children and youth is therefore happening off of the streets and out of the eyes of police, service providers and the general public.

### Community Awareness

Participants in Campbell River talked about the levels of denial in the local community that there is sexual exploitation happening in the city. While people living in certain areas of town may complain about sex workers when they are in their neighborhood, the hidden nature of youth sexual exploitation has resulted in a level of denial in the community. Many people felt that a public acknowledgement of the problem, and other contributing factors such as drug and alcohol addiction, poverty, and unemployment, would be a first step in mobilizing the community to address the sexual exploitation of children and youth. The Campbell River SEAT has held awareness and educational workshops in schools and received positive feedback from students and teachers. Information sessions for parents on internet safety and awareness have also provided a starting place for educational initiatives.

*We need to at least have the politicians recognize it as a problem and not think it's non-existent because down the line there's a lot of kids without mothers and fathers.*

-experiential adult

### Violent Crimes

In Campbell River, participants talked about an escalation in crimes involving weapons such as crowbars and knives. This escalation has been seen in the media and in the lives of clients as well.

### Stigma and Visibility

Exiting the sex trade has been particularly challenging for people who have stayed in Campbell River. The nature of working the streets in a small town means that individuals are always marked as “hookers” even after they have stopped working for many months or years. As well, certain areas of town are known for being the local “stroll” and women who have exited talked about staying far away from these areas. This creates further challenges in finding jobs, being in the community with their children and family, and generally healing from their past. As well, several

*It took a long time to build that trust and get that I had to prove myself but I wasn't even allowed in malls downtown. I was kicked out of every place downtown, no one wanted me around.*

-experiential adult

participants talked about the importance of having ongoing support in the community so that they don't end up back on the street.

## **2. Aboriginal and Cross-cultural Issues**

Some participants talked about experiences where First Nations bands have been reluctant to going through with pressing charges against offenders who are members of their own community. Similar situations are faced by Aboriginal communities across British Columbia where intergenerational abuse and violence create a greater degree of silence and denial within the community. Even though everyone is aware of the abuse, people are afraid to break the silence and challenge the status quo. This can create a division within the band and also within the larger community of people working with the youth victim.

Aboriginal youth in the area would benefit from drop-in programs aimed at meeting their needs. Flexibility is a key component to service provision with this population. However, key informants also discussed the importance of providing a safe place for youth without drug and alcohol use, violence and other factors.

## **3. Individual experiences of violence and safety**

### **Fear of Losing Children**

Many women did not report violence to the police until it became extreme because of a fear of having their children taken away, especially where the abuser is their boyfriend or spouse. Once their children were removed from their care, the women felt that it would be impossible to get them back. Even where the children were witnessing abuse or being abused themselves, they feared that the consequences of reporting the violence would be greater than the violence itself. The women felt they lacked resources for getting away from abusive pimps, boyfriends or spouses because they couldn't bring their children to the safe houses or other resources.

### **Drugs and Violence**

As with most other areas of British Columbia, violence and sex work was linked very closely with drugs. Some women who have exited the sex trade suggested that cracking down on the drug trade in Campbell River would have a positive impact on the amounts of violence on the street. Rather than targeting the sex workers, participants felt that the police should focus their attention on the drug traffickers. As well, they felt that the johns in Campbell River should receive harsher consequences, as this would be a deterrent.

*Decreased violence on the streets? Yeah it's called get rid of the crack. If crack and heroin were more controlled maybe there wouldn't be as much murders and stuff because we have had three stabbings in a week here and that was all over crack.  
-experiential adult*

Additionally, key informants talked about the prevalence of experiential girls hooking up other girls with drug dealers as a way to get money for drugs. Many of these less experienced or knowledgeable girls end up being exploited or abused by the drug dealers.

Rather than seeing the potentially dangerous situation they are putting their friends in, the girls may view it as a “sisterly obligation” because they are helping their friends find drugs. This is particularly true with girls from Vancouver who may be more “street smart” than girls from Campbell River.

#### **4. Formal community supports**

Many of the experiential adults talked about the positive experience they’ve had from local programs in the community, including 12-step programs, the Campbell River Women’s Centre, Aids Vancouver Island, the Transition House and religious-based organizations offering shelter or free food. The Women’s Centre was seen as particularly accessible because of the drop-in nature of the resource.

*We’re not responsible enough to keep appointments. We are not responsible enough to get there and we won’t look in the phone book. We won’t go unless there is a place for us to drop into.*  
- experiential adult

#### **Lack of Drug and Alcohol Treatment**

One challenge facing sex workers and sexually exploited youth in Campbell River is a lack of treatment facilities north of Nanaimo. Participants talked about the difficulty of having to leave the community and their families in order to access detox, drug and alcohol counseling and long-term drug and alcohol treatment. This is especially challenging for people who have children and who may be not be able to find adequate care while they are out of town for an extended period.

#### **Exiting Supports**

Participants discussed the need for more programs to support people who have exited, especially given the stigma within a small town where you become known for being a sex worker. Although one woman talked about having moved on and created a new image for herself in town through proving that she is clean and responsible, it took years for her to feel distanced from her previous life in the sex trade. As one woman said, “A week ago I was at a bus stop and it was a Sunday and a car pulled up and it’s like “What have I got for rent or for sale right across my head?”

#### **5. Legal system**

##### **Absence of Court Cases**

None of the key informants who work with sexually exploited youth and adult sex workers could recall any cases of their clients being involved in a court case as victims of violence or abuse. Workers at the agencies that serve female victims of violence said that in their years of experience in the community, they had not seen one case make it through the courts even though reports have been made to police.

##### **Police Strategies**

The local police have tried various strategies for looking more closely at the root causes of sex work, while still enforcing the communication law by arresting women who are working the streets. Through law enforcement of the communication laws, it is often the

women who end up being charged more often than the customers or johns. The police receive approximately 100 calls each year from members of the local community members about the women working the streets.

One potential strategy was to give a letter to sex workers telling them that they have the option of going to a program for drug and alcohol addiction, and that the charges against them will be dropped if they choose to do so. Women who attended three of the drug and alcohol sessions would have the charges against them dropped and they will not have any further contact with police. This strategy did not go forward because of concerns about the confidentiality of those accessing treatment, however the police are open to pursuing other attempts to address the root causes of the sex trade.

## **6. Recommendations**

### **Addressing Hidden Exploitation**

Participants said that strategies need to be developed to address the hidden nature of sexual exploitation of youth, and to learn more about the extent of the problem in Campbell River. While youth-serving agencies are well aware of the problems of exploitation in the area, it is difficult to press charges against abusers because there are few or no witnesses.

### **Increased Education and Awareness**

Raising awareness of the problems facing sexually exploited youth and sex workers in Campbell River could begin with an increased recognition of the severity of the problem amongst community leaders. Participants suggested that the public would be more sympathetic to the victims of violence and to those working in the sex trade if it was framed differently by the media and community leaders. Educational initiatives in the area have already been undertaken with success, partly through the local Community Action Team and front line service organizations. Key informants discussed the possibility of shifting the media attention from sex workers themselves to johns or pimps, in order to make them more visible rather than exploit the workers in the media.

### **Increased Resources**

Participants talked about the need for increased resources to address some of the root causes of violence, sexual exploitation, and survival sex work. Drug use was one of the main problems that participants felt contribute to violence in the community. Increased resources such as drop-in drug and alcohol services, short-term detox, and long-term supportive recovery beds would provide more treatment options for community members. At the end of the research process, key informants reported an increased commitment of the newly elected Campbell River city council to dedicate funding to drug treatment services.

The local police force has already made efforts to creating opportunities for sex workers to get treatment rather than face criminal charges related to prostitution, but the program did not proceed due to concerns about maintaining the anonymity of clients seeking treatment. Greater consultation and collaboration between the police and local service



providers would help to enhance these types of programs. Additionally, low cost housing and safe housing were said to be essential to addressing issues of safety within the community.

Other suggestions for resources included an increased presence of outreach workers, both on the “stroll” and in other areas of town. Participants felt that by creating relationships between outreach workers or drop in centre workers and sex workers, victims will be more likely to report crimes against them. Participants also said that sex workers need greater access to condoms, clean needles and other resources through taking a harm reduction approach to support services.

### **Outreach to First Nations**

Due to the high percentage of Aboriginal youth in the community and the close proximity of First Nations bands to Campbell River, increased dialogue and outreach between the communities would benefit youth who are being sexually exploited. Integrated case management and other proactive strategies could benefit those youth who may be moving between rural and urban settings, accessing services in both areas.

# **Kamloops and Merritt**

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## **1. Local Issues**

### **Impact of local murders during research process**

During the months of interviewing participants in Kamloops and the surrounding area, two known sex workers were murdered. These recent tragedies within the community highlighted the urgent need to address violence and to create dialogue within the community about the realities facing sex workers. While participants are well aware of the levels of drug use, street level sex work and associated violence, the community resources are not adequate to address victims needs. This was highlighted by the recent deaths and the feeling of helplessness in the community. At the end of the research process, a break in the case has provided a greater degree of hope amongst community members. A task force was established—the Kamloops Active Response Team (KART)—and local initiatives are being undertaken to address the violence and deaths faced by sex workers in the area.

### **Concentration on Kamloops' North Shore**

Participants talked about the divisions between different tracks or areas of Kamloops that emerged after the city cracked down on the downtown stroll. This police crackdown also shut down some of the major drug dealers in town, which resulted in increased violence as the dealers competed over new areas. The North Shore is known as a “ghetto” by many of the experiential adults who have worked in this area. Some participants even compared this area to the Downtown East Side of Vancouver, where drug dealers, drug users, sex trade workers and poor families are concentrated in one area of town. The North Shore Community Patrol has been set up in an attempt to minimize crime in the area. Key informants felt that this type of initiative had the effect of driving the sex trade and sexual abuse underground, as it increasingly happens in private homes, under the bridge, or on the beach where RCMP and service providers rarely go.

### **Role of Drug Dealers**

Drug dealers are known to give girls drugs for free to get them addicted, as well as asking them to hold or sell the drugs for them. Key informants also reported drug dealers lacing joints with crystal meth in order to get youth hooked on it. The youth then end up having huge drug debts and they are threatened with violence if they don't start making money quickly. Girls often become “turned out” by their drug dealers and end up being trapped in cycles of addiction and violence. They may also start trading drugs for tricks, leaving the girls exploited, isolated and addicted with no way out.

### **Organized crime**

There is a heavy presence of organized crime in Kamloops, with bikers on the top of the hierarchy. Other drug dealers, gangs and less organized groups may move in to town and use violence to stake out their territory, but the biker gangs have a steady presence. Participants felt that the presence of organized crime was due in part to Kamloops' location between other major centres such as Vancouver and Calgary, as drugs and other goods may be moved through the area.

### **Impact of Changes in Funding**

In recent years, the changes in social programs and front-line services have had a serious impact on much of the community in Kamloops. Crisis lines, drop-in centres and other important services have been cut, resulting in fewer safe places for sex workers to seek support. Although there are currently safe beds provided for women at the House of Ruth, the area lacks any beds specifically for sex workers or sexually exploited youth. All of the youth beds require parental consent, which is not realistic for most exploited or street-involved youth.

### **Lack of access to Sexually Exploited Youth**

While some outreach workers in Kamloops talked about seeing underage girls on street corners, most said that within a short period of time, these girls would be moved out of town or out of their reach. Participants said that young girls are often moved around a lot to make it difficult for the police or service providers to reach them or build relationships with them.

### **Merritt: Normalization of Violence**

As with other rural communities, sexual exploitation of youth usually occurs at parties and other indoor venues such as private homes. In smaller communities such as Merritt, sexual exploitation is happening at parties and other seemingly “normal” gatherings where youth are being supplied with alcohol or drugs with the expectation that the older men will “get something out of it” in return.

Participants said that the exchange of alcohol and drugs for sexual favors, or the sexual assault of girls while highly intoxicated, has become normalized so that girls are reluctant to name this as exploitation or abuse.

*In a small community like this ... it's between a small town and city that lives with the mythology that there's no racism here, there's no sexual violence here, there is no poverty here .... And they work very hard to keep that myth alive ... city council, a lot of the non-profits, a lot of the businesses want to keep that myth ... but we are determined to change this  
- key informant*

### **Merritt: Myths of Rural Safety**

Merritt and other rural communities often have a common social belief that there is no violence or exploitation in small towns, and that the community is safe. This wide-spread denial often presents a huge barrier for youth who are indeed facing violence or abuse, as there is no common language with which to discuss their experiences and few services to access for support.

## **2. Aboriginal and Cross-cultural Issues**

### **Impact of Racism**

Racism between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the Merritt and Kamloops area has contributed to violence in the community. Youth participants spoke of staying within their own groups, with a lot of rivalry between them based on racial divisions and tensions. Schools in Kamloops have long-standing conflicts, which may be

based on class and racial differences in the socio-economic make up of the students. Aboriginal participants in Merritt also talked about experiences with non-native police officers in which they felt that racism was an underlying factor in the way they were treated.

### **Integrated Case Management**

One affective example of doing cross-cultural work in the Aboriginal community included the use of integrated case management that included asking the local chief to be involved and was initiated by a youth probation officer with the assistance of the band childcare workers. Participants also acknowledged the need for non-native practitioners working with aboriginal youth clients to be aware of the cultural differences that might be overcome through changing expectations and making concessions (such as allowing more time for meetings that might start late).

### **Cultural Differences in Service Provision**

Aboriginal youth are often more mobile than non-Aboriginal youth and may have no fixed address or phone number, staying with extended family. Service providers, police officers, and others need to take these realities in to account and alter their expectations for Aboriginal youth.

### **Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Organizations**

Within Kamloops, participants talked about a significant division between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations and service providers as the funding shortages result in them competing for funding over the issue of sexual exploitation. Some participants talked about the feeling that sexual exploitation has become a “hot topic” in the community and that there is a competition for funding and local resources. Emerging programs and services should be build on the experience of those who have been working with sexually exploited youth over many years.

## **3. Individual experiences of safety and violence**

### **Normalization of Violence**

As with other areas of British Columbia, youth and adult participants discussed violence as a normal and expected part of life. Youth talked about the minimization of violence amongst their peer group and the subsequent silence around creating change. Without an acknowledgement that violence is a significant problem in the community, it is difficult to have conversations about naming violence as violence.

### **Histories of Violence**

Part of the normalization of violence discussed above stems from witnessing or experiencing violence in the home as children. Intergenerational abuse creates silence and shame within families and communities, and a reluctance to talk about the abuse for fear of ostracization or being

*I definitely hear that from the kids themselves ...that...it'll start with just the violence that they've seen by the time they're little...If they witness ...their mothers and like you said become part of it, and then having it be directed toward them.*

- key informant

blamed. In Merritt, participants reported high levels of witnessing violence during childhood and having early involvement in the system.

### **Merritt: Drugs and Alcohol**

Many participants said that sexual assaults and the exchange of sexual favors for alcohol or drugs often happen when they are highly intoxicated. Even if the youth later feel that the incident is worth reporting, their memory of the events may be unclear. Because of this, some participants talked about experiences of trying to report the incidents to the police but no charges were ever laid because of a lack of evidence or because they were not seen as credible witnesses. The lack of community transportation also puts individuals at risk, as they may have no way to get out of a dangerous situation, particularly at a bush party or other isolated location.

*It's much more common because people are spread out all over ...It's not like oh you know I can just hop on the Sky Train ...at 2 am or you know go back....You're just walking, walking, walking...and for all you know nobody's around...You could put a bomb off and [no one would see].*  
- key informant

### **Merritt: Negative Experiences with Reporting**

Participants in Merritt talked about past experiences of reporting sexual abuse and/or assault to the police, particularly as children, and the impact those histories have on their current willingness to report crimes against them. Many participants had negative experiences or knew someone who had a negative experience reported abuse in the past, and said that they would be reluctant to report abuse again. The fear of being labeled a “rat” was also a major barrier to reporting.

### **Blaming the Victim**

Participants talked about attempting to turn to the police, hospitals or other services after experiencing violence against them while working in the sex trade. Many of them talked about being blamed for the violence against them, or being treated with judgment and disrespect during these attempts to seek out help. Some participants reported being put in jail themselves rather than being treated as victims, and feeling that due to being labeled as a “junkie” or a street worker, they don’t have the same ability to report crimes against them.

## **4. Formal community supports**

### **Community services**

Some participants spoke of the police and Victim Services in very positive terms, as they were said to see them as people and not use judgment in their work with sex workers. Others, however, talked about negative experiences of being judged and feeling that they could not turn to the police for help. The relationship between individual police officers and the community was seen as crucial by key informants, as victims are more likely to talk to individual officers that they know and trust. One local police officer does outreach with street nurses and other service providers, which has helped to bridge the relationship between police and community members.

### **Information Sharing**

Although there is no “Bad Date Sheet” in the Kamloops area, an informal information sharing network does exist among clients, front-line workers and the RCMP. The RCMP have built good relationships with many of the service providers and local street-level sex workers, which assists in sharing information about violent individuals in the community.

### **Local Programs for Sex Workers**

SHOP is a program for sex workers that includes meals, discussion, counselling, and support. The program has been successful in reaching out to street level sex workers who need a place to connect with one another and get referrals to local agencies. Due to recent changes in funding, SHOP is now called the Place To Go Program and is running out of the AIDS Society in partnership with the Elizabeth Fry Society. As well, local outreach workers and street nurses go to the stroll to connect with sex workers, offering food, condoms and referral information. These initiatives have created a greater relationship with the women working on the street as well as between the agencies involved.

## **5. Legal system**

### **Successful Cases**

Participants in Kamloops talked about several successful cases in which violent offenders were found guilty and given significant sentences for their acts of aggravated sexual assault against sex workers. Key informants were also aware that the judge made positive statements that were reported in the media, including the fact that the victim was a sex worker but it did not impact the outcome of the case and did not condone the violence toward the victim. Some people saw this as sending a strong message to the community that crimes against sex workers will be taken seriously in the local courtroom and that perpetrators will not get off easily.

### **Police initiatives**

A system is in place for police to track all of the known sex workers in Kamloops (primarily street-level sex workers, rather than those working in indoor venues), including photographs and information on when they were last seen. This assists the police when a worker goes missing or is the victim of a crime. Of the sex workers that police are seeing, approximately 90% of the sex workers in Kamloops are working at street level or are not affiliated with an agency. As previously mentioned, the KART (Kamloops Active Response Team) is a new police initiative that has been developed in response to the recent murders of local sex workers.

## **6. Recommendations**

### **Increased Resources**

Participants talked about wanting to see a resource of integrated health and wellness centre for people who are trying to exit a life of street-involvement, sexual exploitation, violence and addiction. Housing resources were also a priority for all of the participants, as lack of housing is seen as a main barrier to those seeking to get out of abusive and

exploitative situations. Exiting resources are also needed in Kamloops, Merritt and the surrounding areas. Specific services for youth, such as safe beds for sexually exploited youth, are also resources that are much needed in the community.

### **Greater Integrated Team Work**

Participants talked about the need for service providers to utilize one another's programs and refer clients to one another when appropriate. In particular, service providers should be aware of the availability of Aboriginal resources and seek out ways to enable victims to make use of them in times of crisis (including local elders, smudging, and other cultural practices). A list of elders should be made available to give victims access to traditional healing practices.

### **Acknowledge the Hidden Elements**

More resources are needed to acknowledge and address the hidden nature of sexual exploitation, which often happens at parties and in remote areas around Kamloops and Merritt. Some strategies and programs have been developed, such as a youth program that taught participants how to deal with violence at parties and equipped them with a cell phone that they could use to call for help if needed. This peer education model was effective in equipping a small group of youth in Kamloops to talk to their friends about violence and sexual exploitation, but more of these programs are needed in order to effectively reach youth in all segments of the population.

Recently, the SHOP Program (now called the Place To Go Program) has been given financial support by the Kamloops City Council, which key informants saw as a good step in acknowledging the needs and experiences of local sex workers.

Additionally, while the police are successfully reaching out to street-level sex workers, those working in indoor venues remain largely unaccounted for. Initiatives to build relationships with those working in indoor venues would increase the levels of safety of the women involved.

### **Cross-Cultural Training**

Key informants saw training in cultural competence as one significant measure to strengthen existing services for sexually exploited youth and adult sex workers in the area. With large Aboriginal populations in the areas around Kamloops and Merritt, police, counselors, health care providers and others could benefit from learning specific skills for working across these cultural differences. One possible location that was suggested for training initiatives is the Quaaout Lodge, a centre run by the Little Shuswap Indian Band, which houses cross-cultural events and educational opportunities on a regular basis.

# Terrace, Kitimaat and Hazelton

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## 1. Local Issues

### Isolation

These communities are extremely isolated from one another and from larger urban centres and face unique challenges in addressing violence because of this. It is 73 km from Terrace to Kitimaat, 140km from Terrace to Hazelton, and 573 km from Terrace to Prince George, the closest urban setting. Another unique factor is the small populations in these areas: Terrace 12,779, Kitimat 11,136 and Hazelton 985 people. For many, the only way to get from one town to the next is by hitchhiking. Participants talked about feeling special for being picked up when hitchhiking without an awareness that they are at great danger for sexual assault and other types of violence.

### Hidden Sex Trade

Although there is no formal sex trade in these areas, it is known that sex work and sexual exploitation happens within private homes in closed social circles. In the community of Kitwanga (outside of Hazelton), a criminal investigation is underway involving an elderly man that has been sexually assaulting youth for decades. In exchange he provides them with money, drugs and alcohol. Another example involved an individual in Terrace who is known to trade alcohol for sexual favors with young girls. Without a formal sex trade or known “strolls”, it is challenging for front line workers to know who may be involved in the trade.

*Crime is increasing like with the alcohol and the drugs ... even...there are some gang bangings that are happening ...And that also goes under the rug because people don't want to talk about it*  
-key informant

### Issues Facing Youth

It is common for youth in these communities to face sexual violence throughout their lives, by their peer group as well as older people in the community. Some common experiences include being drugged, blacking out and later realizing they were sexually assaulted. Additionally many young girls aged 13 or 14 are going out with older men of 19 to 25 years. Youth victims are also committing violence against their peers, possibly a result of the violence they themselves have faced.

### Issues Facing Adults

Adults in the area are very aware of the Highway of Tears (HWY 16) where women have gone missing while hitchhiking. Despite this, they feel they have no choice but to take the risk of hitchhiking because it's the only way they can get out of town. The women feel immobilized- a person in Kitimat cannot simply access local transit and they also lack safe spaces to go in times of trouble. Adults are also engaging in survival sex work within domestic relationships for shelter, food, clothing, and a sense of belonging.

*It's like will you love me if I let you do this to me? A lot of it has to do with young girls that have babies and they're single mothers .... They want to keep their babies alive and well-fed.*  
-key informant



Similar to other areas of British Columbia (BC), drugs and alcohol are closely associated with the sex trade, particularly at bars, parties and on the street where women are offered these things in exchange for sexual favors.

### **Victims as Support Workers**

In Terrace and Hazelton, as in many communities across BC, it is primarily women who work in front-line jobs supporting youth and adult victims of sexual and physical abuse. Many of the women working in these front-line positions may themselves have histories of abuse within their families and may require additional support in their roles. Due to the gap between the women workers and the male leadership in the communities, there may be little support for initiatives to deal with the issues they face.

## **2. Aboriginal and Cross-cultural Issues**

### **Residential School Legacy**

The majority of the local Gitksan Nation has been affected by the legacy of residential schools and day schools in the area. The majority of adults in the community are still healing from their childhood experiences at these schools, and acknowledging this process is part of intervening in cycles of intergenerational abuse.

### **Male Leadership**

Within northern First Nations communities, the primarily male leadership of the chief and band councils may leave women feeling extremely powerless and helpless. Participants talked about experiences of being abused by people in positions of power, which creates a lack of trust for authority figures and makes them unlikely seek help. As well, the abusers in the Aboriginal community may include hereditary chiefs or wing chiefs who use their status to silence victims. Male leaders also approve all initiatives within the community, which may result in little willingness to support attempts to address sexual exploitation or violence against women. Key informants talked about situations in which female front-line workers were prevented from participating in local initiatives to address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, due to a lack of approval from the male leaders.

*I think one major factor that should be at least acknowledged is [that]...our people, our culture was not like this. It's only through European contact and residential schools that ... attempted to totally destroy our culture...but they haven't succeeded. We're terribly crippled and not just in body but in spirit right now but we still have our culture and I think it's very important.*  
-key informant

### **Being Forced to Leave**

Victims of violence face further isolation when they are forced to leave their home communities in order to escape their abusers. The small, close-knit communities do not provide any privacy or confidentiality in trying to escape violence or cycles of addiction and exploitation. Victims also fear coming forward because their family may be ostracized or may be denied resources within the community. This is particularly true in small communities where one family may make up the majority of the community and may be able to ostracize victims who are from other families. Key informants said that

this kind of family clout can be used to silence the victims due to the fear of being targeted for speaking out.

### **3. Individual experiences of violence and safety**

Due to the lack of opportunities for youth in these communities, they are particularly at risk for exploitation and violence. Intersecting factors such as poverty, racist stereotypes, addiction and low self-esteem all contribute to heightened levels of abuse.

#### **Intergenerational and Familial abuse**

People in these communities talked about intergenerational abuse within their family, which creates a closed family cycle where many of the adults they know are involved as abusers. For some, everyone they know has been abused but no one talks about it or acknowledges this reality because it has become normalized. Abuse in these communities may come at the hands of authority figures, including chiefs and band leaders, which causes an extreme degree of silence and shame for those involved. Key informants also talked about cases of girls becoming pregnant by their fathers, and facing life-long difficulties without the recognition of the abuse they have faced. Addressing child sexual abuse may be one key way to prevent youth from becoming sexually exploited later in life.

#### **Increased Use of the Internet**

Youth in these communities are increasingly using the internet to connect with new friends outside of the area. Youth are becoming involved in exploitative relationships over the internet and are making use of webcams and other technology to show their bodies to older men or “boyfriends”. Key informants also talked about specific incidents of child pornography involving local youth.

*The Internet has changed a lot of things. There's a lot of kids...going off to meet their new best friend...Sometimes they come back and sometimes they don't come back.*

-key informant

#### **Feeling Alone**

Due to the silence about issues of violence and exploitation amongst youth and adults alike, even close friendships and family relationships are not safe places to turn for support. Although many youth have friends around all the time and may in fact feel afraid to be alone, deeper issues of trauma go unresolved within peer groups. The services that are available are well known to the youth and they do make use of them when they are able.

### **4. Formal community supports**

#### **Lack of Services and Funding**

Key informants talked about the funding imbalance that exists between rural and urban communities in BC, where Vancouver and Prince George have resources that are simply not available in Hazelton, Kitimat and the surrounding areas. Providing greater resources to these areas could help to break the intergenerational cycles of abuse and addiction, but

there is no funding to support these initiatives. Individual front line workers are coping with the multi-layered issues of the community without formal support networks to sustain them.

### **Need for Skill Building and Capacity Building**

Key informants talked about their interest in gaining skills to deal with sexual exploitation and violence in the community, but not having the resources to do so. Terrace and Hazelton lack the human and financial resources to support frontline workers' efforts to address sexual exploitation and violence in these areas. Front-line workers would benefit from training in how to deal with crises as they arise, in order to act quickly and mobilize community resources effectively. Many service providers have developed specialized skills through working in this area for many years, but face high burnout rates and need more funding and support to feel valued.

## **5. Legal system**

### **Community Initiatives: Police**

There have been some successful community initiatives to create a greater connection between the local community and the legal system. Local police have done outreach in schools and talked about how they may be of assistance to the youth. The Community Police Office is also well known in the community and can be utilized if someone is in need of help. Some of the participants talked very positively about the police, particularly the younger generation of police officers. As well, participants talked about the huge and long-lasting impact that an effective police sergeant can have on the community. Previously, the Law Links Program brought high school youth on a field trip to a courthouse to familiarize them with this environment (this program is no longer running). Key informants said that all police who are new to the area should have training in working cross-culturally in Aboriginal communities in order to build effective relationships and gain the community's trust.

*I think it's a matter of collaborating....because when we do have RCMP come out and...[they] participate in our fun days or participate in our workshops, the youth really ...do take to them, they really open up to them. I think that's where relationship building could happen is... involve the youth...and involve the RCMP...I think that's all it is – is just exposure.*

-Key informant

### **Hazelton: Crisis Response Team**

Recently, a Hazelton Crisis Response Team was formed in response to a young person from Gitwanga who wanted to press charges against their abuser. A team of front-line workers came together, bringing resources to the families and parents, offering support and making it possible for victims to go to a local healing centre. Charges were successfully made against an elder in the community who had been abusing children for many years, and as many as twenty youth came forward with their stories of victimization. The crisis response team faces challenges due to job turnover, particularly with local police who may have short-term postings.

## Reporting

As in other parts of BC, victims are reluctant to report violence against them for multiple reasons. Although one participant talked about successfully gaining a restraining order against her abuser, most had not seen positive results from reporting violence to the police.

As well, victims are lacking the support and information necessary to go through with reporting

violence to the police. For example, some participants thought that victims must first go to the police detachments in Terrace or Kitimat to report the incident before they can access Victim Services. However, this is not true in all cases, as specialized Victim Services have different procedures than police-based Victim Services. More education and outreach would help to inform victims about the services available.

*I think it's a lack of trust ...with the justice system. It's a lack of trust with...with any organization that is viewed as an authority.*

-key informant

As well, participants said that the police lacked sensitivity to the specific challenges facing Aboriginal victims, including the intersecting factors of intergenerational abuse and power imbalances within the band system. Because of the small community, most people know someone who has had an experience with the police and if it was a negative experience, it impacts the perspective of an entire network of friends and family. Confidentiality is also lacking in these small, close-knit communities, and Aboriginal victims often go to non-Aboriginal services which may provide a greater degree of anonymity.

## Aboriginal Justice and Restorative Justice

Participants in Hazelton identified house clan meetings as an alternative to addressing justice issues in their communities. Concerns were raised as to the effectiveness and consistency of this system because monitoring is needed from a family member to ensure the offender is fulfilling the clan meeting recommendations (such as counseling, going to feasts, etc). While a committed family member can make this system successful, the person monitoring the offender can't be afraid to report cases where they are not adhering to the conditions of probation. Restorative justice models are used in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and is seen as a way of bringing healing and resolution for victims and community members. Key informants said that Aboriginal victims don't necessarily want to deal with abuse through traditional methods, however, and that a combination of traditional and judicial approaches may be most appropriate. The pros and cons of these restorative justice models should be investigated further in respect to dealing with sexual exploitation, violence and sexual abuse.

An additional measure taken by Aboriginal communities is to ban offenders. Key informants talked about a local band council that passed a resolution to keep a violent sexual offender out of the community after he was released from jail. This worked effectively to protect and support the victims, including members of the man's family.

## **6. Recommendations**

### **Domestic Response Team**

A Northern Domestic Response Team is needed to address the high levels of abuse faced by youth and adults in their own homes and by their own family members. Team members should be aware of the reality of Aboriginal communities, and be able to work with cultural sensitivity. This resource should be tied in with local police resources, raising the profile and visibility of the police in the community, particularly with an increase of female police officers. Building on the above-mentioned Crisis Response Team model, this team may consist of counselors, victim support workers, health care practitioners, police, and others, which are currently lacking in the north. Safe housing would help to support the work of this team and would encourage victims to leave violent situations by providing them with housing options.

### **Community Awareness**

Participants talked about the need for community initiatives to increase dialogue and awareness about sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, violence and other issues which are widespread in the community. This is a particularly difficult task given the particular realities of intergenerational violence victims are facing, but it is necessary in order to stop the cycles of abuse from repeating themselves. Along with increased awareness must come increased resources for dealing with the effects of opening up this legacy of silence. First Nations chiefs and other community leaders must also be challenged to acknowledge the widespread problems amongst their band members and commit to taking action to create change.

### **Mobilizing Existing Resources**

The service providers that work in Hazelton and Terrace are working hard to address problems of violence and exploitation in the lives of their clients. However, they face a great lack of resources and an abundance of resistance from the community. By coming together to share resources, make referrals between agencies, and communicate regularly about these issues, their work can be strengthened. Service providers also need to support one another to develop the personal strength to build community support for the issue. Key informants felt that more resources should be focused on violence prevention and community agencies should work together rather than competing for resources and funding. One recent initiative is the development of a safe house for youth—a building has recently been purchased for this purpose but funding has not yet been secured for service provision.

### **Training and Skill Building**

The work of local service providers could also be strengthened through gaining skills and information about sexual exploitation. Some ideas include a community forum, specialized training, and increased access to research, handbooks and publications. Service providers also need more information about mental health issues, addiction, trauma and related issues facing their clients.

## Prince George

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In Prince George, nine key informants were interviewed. Individuals were selected who had been closely involved with court cases in which the victims were sexually exploited youth. These cases were seen as potential examples of “best practices”, as the cases were successful in achieving a conviction of the offenders. Individuals in a range of positions were interviewed including police, lawyers, Victim Services workers and front-line workers who provided individual support for the youth victims. The questions asked in Prince George were different from the other communities in order to get specific information about what made these cases successful, what could be done to improve the process in future cases, and what should be done as “next steps” in Prince George. In two main cases, there were multiple victim witnesses that made statements against the same perpetrators. In one high profile case against a well-known local authority figure, a guilty plea was entered and the witnesses did not have to testify.

### 1. Unique Factors

#### High profile cases

Two recent cases we focused on in this research were reported in the media and gained a lot of attention in the local community. One of the cases involved a high profile community member who ultimately pleaded guilty to charges relating to his sexual exploitation and violent abuse of local Aboriginal girls. One of the other cases involved three pimps being found guilty of sexually exploiting teenage girls.

Some participants felt that the high-profile nature of the cases created pressure within the community that helped in getting a successful conviction. They thought that once the media and the community knew about the cases, there was less chance of them being dropped by the courts. However, those supporting the youth through the process feared there would be repercussions if the case did not end with a conviction, such as the loss of their jobs or violence towards the victims. Several key informants reported facing threats from people in positions of power during their involvement in the cases. And, in fact, some people involved in the case were transferred or lost their positions after the court proceedings were finished. Whether or not these job changes were directly related to the case is unclear, but some people felt that the connection was very strong.

The high profile nature of the cases also brought specific concerns about anonymity, which was compromised due to the public nature of the court proceedings. Key informants said that the media attention put additional pressure on the victims, including one case in which a reporter located one of the girls at her home and she didn't know how

#### High profile cases

*Young women that are sexually exploited are assaulted all the time and it gets nowhere near the level of attention this did. It is only because of the man's position it came up.*

#### Victims with criminal records

*The girls with whom I dealt in the [one] case, some of them had records that were pages long, but the actual serious crimes they committed - most of them I would say the number is zero.*

to tell them to leave. Although the media represented the cases well, informants felt that some members of the media harassed the victims, particularly in the case of media from the Lower Mainland.

### **Power differences between offenders and victims**

The accused had huge amounts of control over the victims as their pimps or johns, as did their economic circumstances, addictions and street codes of silence. Some of the victims had also been in front of one of the perpetrators in his role as a judge, and this is, in fact, how one of the first disclosures emerged. As one of the participants reported: “that’s where the first disclosure came out right. Some kid walked into court and said ‘Oh my god, that’s one of my johns’.”

### **Multi-layered trauma**

The victims in the cases had specific histories of trauma, addictions, oppression, racism, and a fear of not being believed. It was extremely time consuming and challenging to find one victim who was willing to give a statement to the police in order to launch the initial investigation because of these factors.

### **History of victims in court system**

Many of the victims had criminal records or had been through the court system in family court. Due to this specific experience with the justice system, they were not able to see how the courts would protect them or why it would be important for them to help in getting a successful conviction. The police and lawyers had to continually inform the youth about their role as victim witnesses and clarify misinformation, fears and temptations to flee.

### **Street codes**

The fear of ratting was one of the main preventative factors in getting the youth to give statements against their abusers. Key informants stressed that being labeled a rat will have long-term consequences for the victims, including taking away their source of income and drugs, threatening their friendship and family networks, and potentially putting them at risk of further physical and sexual abuse.

### **Timeline**

The victims in these cases were initially very reluctant to talk to the police or make formal statements about their experiences. In some cases, it took two years of meeting with the victims, gaining their trust and giving them time to allow them to be comfortable talking about their experiences.

### **Multiple levels of exploitation**

*The victims are kind of triply exploited in some ways. Usually they’ve been abused as children before they are even out in the street and then when they’re out on the street, you know they’re further abused by people and then they have these strange relationships with their abusers and the people that exploit them.*

### **Mistrust**

*They don’t trust the system, the youth. The street involved ones anyway. Yeah it’s authority, white authority, white system, they don’t trust it.*

## **2. Aboriginal and Cross-Cultural Issues**

### **Historical factors**

The youth victims in these cases were aboriginal, and had a fear of not being believed due to the racism and stigma that they had already faced in the community. This was especially important in one case in which the accused had a large amount of power over the lives of the victims, their families, and communities. Given the history of the court system in Aboriginal communities and the colonial relationship, the power held by the victims and the accused was infinitely different in this case.

### **Aboriginal organizations**

Most of the individuals and organizations who supported the youth through the court process were not Aboriginal, with local First Nations becoming involved at the end of the cases. During the court process, information had to be kept quiet to ensure a successful case which did not allow for much communication outside the core support team, but information was shared on a need-to-know basis. This dynamic resulted in a lack of information for the Aboriginal organizations who were distanced from the cases. Although Aboriginal organizations were involved, key informants felt that they could have taken a more active role.

### **Trauma in community**

While it is important that Aboriginal youth be given the opportunity to have their community and cultural practices available during the court process, historical factors should also be considered. Many youth may wish to keep their sexual exploitation, drug use and street life separate from their Aboriginal community because of the alienation and judgment that they would face if their lives were revealed. Youth from reserves outside of Prince George may not want their communities to know what they have faced so that they still have the opportunity to go home safely. As children, the victims may also have faced abuse from members of their band or family and may have intergenerational cycles of abuse that intersect with their own family history. This may also not make it desirable for members of their community to be contacted.

## **3. Needs of sexually exploited youth victims**

### **Ongoing support**

While it is important to have more convictions of perpetrators of violence against sexually exploited youth, the court process is long and can be very traumatizing, especially for those victims who have to testify. In the words of one participant, “the court doesn’t cure their problem and it might even add to it”. Victims need support through the entire process as they deal with the repercussions of making statements to the police, and being available as potential witnesses during the trial. During the recent cases in Prince George, it took an enormous amount of time and energy to support the youth with their daily struggles during the criminal justice process.



### **Basic needs**

Many of the youth's lives were very unstable and needed support in having their basic needs met in order for them to be available during the investigation and court dates. Funding and donations were needed to supply housing, food, clothing, transportation, treatment, medical care and other essentials.

Counseling and one-on-one support was also essential in addressing their ongoing fears of being labeled a “rat” and dealing with the emotional and psychological challenges they were facing. For the most part, participants said that these support systems lasted only as long as the court case and the victims were once again on their own when the case was finished.

#### **Meeting Basic Needs**

*If they didn't have support with being able to survive, then you know we wouldn't have had witnesses.*

### **Age**

Although the victims were all under age 19 when the offenses took place, some of them were considered adults at the time of the court proceedings. For those that were over 19, there were no mechanisms in place to support them even though they had previously been in the care of the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD). However, in one case a senior manager was able to argue that the Ministry was effectively the victim's parent and was responsible for providing support beyond their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, especially for offenses that took place while they were in care.

### **Group dynamics between victims**

All of the cases had multiple victims that had made statements about the offences against them. In some cases, especially for those youth who were housed together in a group home or other group setting, these relationships created challenges during the court process. While housing the youth together can help the victims feel they are not going through this alone, there is also the potential for personal and group problems to emerge as a result of their heightened levels of fear and trauma, and ongoing issues of substance use, family separation and street involvement.

#### **Choice for victims**

*I chose not to take a hard line at all that says “you must do this”. ...There was quite a bit of hand holding in the sense that you had to be sensitive to the victim's circumstances and particularly to their cognitive abilities.*

### **Ownership over the process**

While many factors in the lives of the victims may be out of their control, especially during the often confusing court process, there are ways that the core support team was able to put some control back in to their hands. By allowing the youth to work at their own pace through the entire process, from giving statements to the police through to meeting with the prosecutor and choosing their main support person, the youth had a greater degree of control. This is one important element that the investigating officers used when working with the youth,

#### **Education for youth**

*You've got to tell them how the court system works, what it is to be a witness and how to give evidence. People don't necessarily understand what you're doing is you're dealing with the facts, not opinions, not things you've heard from other people.*

recognizing that if you don't have witnesses, you don't have a case. Putting the life experiences and preferred pace of the youth upfront helped to build trusting relationships.

A concern arose after the court cases were finished and organizations from outside of the Prince George community wanted to make the cases examples for larger social justice movements. Although the victims themselves felt happy with the outcome of the court cases, the work of outside organizations undermined what they felt was a victory. This was due in part to a lack of communication between the outside organizations and those local people who had been working with the victims throughout the long legal process. This worked against the attempts of local organizations to give the victims ownership over the court process and support them on a personal level rather than make the court process part of a larger cause.

### **Going AWOL**

In many cases, it was essential that someone be available to find the youth when it came time for them to testify in court or meet with the lawyers. Having a team of people who may be able to do this – such as social workers, police, etc. – ensured that the lawyers could focus on preparing court documents and not worry about whether or not the witnesses would be present and prepared for court proceedings. One key element was being in communication with social workers who may move youth out of Prince George and will need to be able to locate the youth for court appearances.

### **Importance of “parenting” role**

While many of the youth victims in these cases were in the care of the Ministry at some point, others had parents who were directly involved with supporting them through the court case. Participants in the research discussed the importance of having someone in a parenting role during the court process, as they will be able to support them and liaise with the core support team. Victim Services workers, lawyers and police said that this relationship with a parent figure is very helpful in building a strong support network for the victim where possible.

Other issues the youth dealt with during the court case were:

- Substance use
- Self-harming and consideration of suicide
- Protection and safety issues
- Lack of anonymity in open court
- Re-traumatization in the court room, facing the offender

## **4. A Coordinated Effort**

Many factors contributed to making these cases successful. It is truly essential to have a coordinated effort and a shared goal of having a successful court case. As you will see from the points below, each person who contributed to these cases played an important role in their success. More highlights follow in the Best Practices/Recommendations section.

### **It Takes a Village**

All of the people interviewed for this project indicated that no one person worked in isolation on these cases. Due to community meetings and inter-agency training, as well as long-term positions held within the community, many of the key people had working relationships established well before the court cases began. Starting in 1998, youth services meetings were held monthly, allowing people to get to know each other both formally and informally. These relationships created a level of trust and a commitment to support one another through the court process.

In each case, a small team of people worked closely with one another and the victims on the investigation and court process. An extended network of support people was key to enabling the youth to stay present in their role as victim witnesses. One key factor to the success of these networks was having clearly defined roles and being able to trust one another to do various tasks.

### **Role of Core Team: Police, Crown Counsel, and key support person**

All of the people interviewed talked about the extreme dedication and commitment of the investigating officer, lawyers and key support person in these cases. The role of this core team is to focus on the court process and to gather information that will ensure a successful court case.

The investigating police officer is responsible for conducting the police investigation, including obtaining statements from victims, and providing the results of their investigation to Crown Counsel. If the officer is unable to obtain statements from victims, there is no case. The police in these cases were careful in creating relationships with the youth involved as well as their support people in the community, to let them know that they believed them and would be ready to listen at any time. The police depended on those who were closest to the youth to facilitate their relationship with the youth and to validate their position as someone whom they could trust.

The Crown Counsel work closely with the police, focusing on the legal process. In these cases, the most success came from the prosecutor's ability to gain the trust of the youth. It was essential that the prosecutors be both sensitive to the life experience of the youth victims and also be completely honest about the long, challenging court process.

Working closely with the police and prosecutor were key support people, and in some cases one main support person chosen by the youth. This person (or people) acted as a mediator between the youth and other members of the core team, making sure the youth were prepared for

#### **It takes a village**

*Everybody that I asked for assistance just tore down all the barriers and provided help without question.*

#### **Team effort**

*You know the bottom line is to make a case successful like this, it has to be good working relationships right from the grass roots up...It's a time commitment and a dedication, and it also has to be done for the right reasons.*

#### **Distinct roles**

*It's key that everybody understands what their role in this whole project is or the whole investigation. That has to be defined.*

their court dates, that they were available to meet with the police, and that their basic needs were being met. In one example, funding was obtained to pay a community support person (chosen by the youth) to be in this role during the court process because of the high profile nature of the case and the history that the victims had as being in the care of the province.

### **Role of Support Team:**

While the core team focused more specifically on the court process, a larger support team was committed to the wellbeing of the youth and one another. Some of these individuals acted within their paid positions while others volunteered their time due to a personal relationship with the youth or to others involved.

One key element was the various levels of involvement, and the need for some people to know very little information about the case in order to keep providing services to the youth. While some people who were closely involved in supporting the youth were able to share information and debrief with one another, others clearly should not know information about the court process or they may be called to testify in court, have their records subpoenaed, or otherwise compromise their daily working relationship with the youth.

One element of the support team was to have one person available at all times to the youth, using a pager or cell phone for twenty-four hour access. This ensured that if the youth had a crisis, someone would be there to respond.

Victim Services workers were involved in some of these cases, including Police Victim Services and Crown Victim Services (which was still available during this time period). The role of the Victim Services workers was to provide detailed information to the victims about the court process, or to work with their caregiver to provide this information. Key informants felt there was a distinction to be made between the role of Crown Victim Services which strengthen the court case by ensuring the victims were well informed and prepared, and that of Police Victim Services which supported the victims more directly. After the Crown Victim Services program was eliminated, lawyers have had to spend extra time doing these things themselves. One suggested strategy was for Victim Services workers to make immediate contact with the victim after the statements have been given to the police or Crown Counsel, ensuring the victim knows there are formal supports and information available.

### **Agency Support**

All of the participants talked about the desire of agencies to provide support and the challenges they faced in their own agency guidelines. Because of cuts made to provincial ministries and local programs, organizations could not afford to allow a worker to focus on the case without financial compensation to hire a relief worker.

#### **Inter-agency support**

*I worked in a couple of places around the province and Prince George was actually quite unique. We had developed I think really good working relationships between the agencies.*

Most of the victims had been in the care of the province at some point, even if they were over the age of 19 at the time of the court case. Because of this history, resources were made available through the Ministry to support the youth who had been in care, providing a core support person and resources for clothing, food and other necessities. However, many people felt that the high profile nature of the case contributed to the decision to provide support money.

Participants also said that everyone who was asked for assistance was more than willing to help, providing resources or energy, including Elizabeth Fry Society, the YMCA, and Youth Around Prince Resource Centre (YAP). These resources were often given without financial compensation.

### **Skills, Experience and Knowledge**

The support people that worked on these cases were successful because of their unique combination of education, experience, sensitivity, knowledge, and a comfort level in working with sexually exploited youth. While the police and lawyers held important information about the court process itself, those working closely with the youth had a wealth of information about the unique needs of the victims.

While many of the front-line workers were accustomed to dealing with the realities of high-risk youth, those involved directly in the court process were not necessarily as comfortable with them.

While some lawyers had years of experience working with street-involved youth and people dealing with addictions, not all lawyers bring this level of comfort and knowledge to their work. In some cases the lawyers relied on front-line workers to communicate with the youth at a level that was realistic given their life experience.

Inter-agency training had been provided in Prince George on working with sexually exploited youth. The training included Crown Counsel, police, members of the school district, and social workers. Participants learned information that prepared them for developing a coordinated response when a case arose and also established relationships between the participants.

### **Personal Commitment**

A great many of the people involved in the cases worked above and beyond their duties for the duration of the cases. Personal commitments to the victims were key to the success of the case. It was because of their personal commitment, including one woman who was willing to quit her job in order to provide support, that the youth were able to make it to court and stay afloat. Many members of the support team dedicated their own free time to seeing the case through to the end. Some people had time allocated for their involvement in the case, but many of them went over that allocated time and made themselves available whenever they were needed. Significantly, others said that they only worked within the allocated hours and did not go beyond their official position on these cases.

#### **Personal Commitment**

*I told the girls “If you’re willing to put your ass out on the line, so am I”*

## **Role of Gender**

All of the victims in the cases we discussed during this research were female and key informants felt that the victims were more trusting of female support people, including police. Overall, the males involved in the cases were able to remain at more of an emotional distance from the youth and the issues than the women, and did not develop deep relationships with the youth. Although the males may have been able to gain the trust of the youth, it was often facilitated by a female who was closer to the victim. It was important to maintain a balance between the roles of the men and women involved, and to respect the various levels of closeness with the victims.

## **Personal Impact**

The cases impacted everyone differently and to varying degrees. Some people said that these cases were no different than any other cases and that it was normal for them to have involvement in intense, long-term investigations such as these. However, others reported being deeply impacted by their involvement in the cases, emotionally, professionally, mentally and physically. Those who were most deeply affected by these particular cases were those who worked closely with the victims over the long-term on a daily basis. For some, it clarified the role that they wanted to play in their careers by validating that they were successful in working with sexually exploited youth in highly volatile situations. Working closely with the victims and creating a sense of safety and comfort was one of the larger accomplishments of those in the core support networks. Creating relationships with one another was also a key achievement that people felt good about.

Many of those people who had worked on cases with violence against children, youth and women, said that they had created their own ways of dealing with issues of trauma on the job. Over the long term, however, most of them reported that burn out was a reality they had to accept. Some of them had developed coping mechanisms such as not having images of violence in their homes in order to “leave work at work”.

## **Coping and Self Care**

One important element of supporting one another throughout the court cases was the ability of some people to call one another at home any time, day or night. This was most critical to those in the core team, as they were directly impacted by changes in the youth’s wellbeing and the court process. Some individuals were able to set and maintain self-care plans with the assistance of other community

### **Burn out**

*I still cannot have in my house any type of TV program that relates to any kind of sexual violence. It has to go off because my anxiety level starts to go up which says to me “You’ve been affected” and the other part about that is once you’re affected, you can’t undo it.*

### **Core Team Support**

*We had committed to each other that we were going to take care of each other during this case*

*When one of the victims was struggling and threatened we were connecting to each other outside of the work hours to make sure that it was being deal with.*

members. For many of the people interviewed, the most important element was feeling that they were not alone and had someone to call upon when a crisis arose.

Some of those working on these cases felt that their agencies supported them fully while others did not. Very few of the participants in the research said that their agencies formally acknowledged their contribution to achieving a successful conviction, and almost none of the agencies involved had mechanisms in place for debriefing or distressing after the case ended. Some people were expected to keep up with their regular case load for the duration of the court process and they were even reprimanded for their work on these cases.

## **5. Recommendations and Best Practices**

This final section includes information that could be identified as “best practices” in making these cases successful. It also includes recommended “best practices” that the participants felt could have strengthened the process.

### **Supportive Funding**

Funding needs to be readily available when cases with sexually exploited youth victims make it to the court system, not just high profile or exceptional cases. Funding is needed to provide resources for the victims through the court process. As one participant stated, it is critical “to have everyone on board, to have the money and have the OK to move on things”.

### **Dedicated worker**

Once the youth have chosen their support person, that person should be funded as the designated worker on the case throughout the court process. During this time, the support person should be able to step out of their regular position and return to it once the case has been finalized. This position should also be flexible enough to include reasonable follow-up with the victims after the case is finished, both in recognition of the long-term impact on the victims and of the significant relationship the victims will have developed with the worker. This person could have responsibility for being the liaison between the youth and other people involved, such as police and lawyers, and for coordinating the core team working on the case.

This person, along with other members of the core support team, need to be available at all times. A pager or cell phone should be passed around to the group so that one person is always a phone call away in case a crisis emerges.

### **The bigger picture**

*Walking away from the courthouse, I was satisfied with the outcome of the case. And I knew that some girl out there was going to get assaulted today and it would probably go unreported because there's no structure in place to do anything about it.*

### **Distinct roles**

*There were only a few of us who know the whole picture until it was time to go to court.*

*I think that that was one of the elements to the success is that not a lot of people were involved.*

As one participant said, “it doesn’t matter who can pick up the phone or are next to it but somebody is there to get the ball rolling if something comes up because I think timing is everything and if you miss it then who knows where they’re going to end up”.

### **Children in Care**

Official mechanisms need to be put in to place to ensure long-term support for youth in care, extending beyond their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. While funding was obtained in these cases on a one-time basis, no larger policy changes were made, and these are crucial to supporting future cases. Most of the sexually exploited youth involved in these cases had been in the care of the province, which will likely be similar to other parts of BC.

### **Changes in legislation**

One recommendation was to put legislation in place that enables the courts to apprehend youth with addictions during the court case. This would ensure that they are clean, available, and receiving counseling and other supports at a residential treatment facility. Key informants also called for legislative changes which move beyond the age of consent to address differences in power between victims and abusers, taking in to account the mental capacity and functional age of victims, including assessments for cognitive functioning.

### **Legislative changes**

*We need changes to the criminal code...it needs to be easier to charge men that buy or sell sex from children. So there may need to be some changes around the age of consent...there must be some way to legally define inequitable power.*

### **Court Case Processing**

Many of the people interviewed felt that there was pressure put on Crown Counsel to win all of their cases and to uphold their record in court. Participants talked about their experience with decisions by Crown Counsel to not prosecute crimes against children or other victims that may be seen as unreliable or lacking credibility. It was suggested that Crown Counsel need to take risks to prosecute more cases with child and youth victims, even if it means losing more cases. It was also suggested that court cases would be viewed as more successful if they moved through the justice system more quickly, minimizing the impact of the court process on victim witnesses.

### **Education about the justice system**

It is likely that group home staff, social workers, outreach workers, teachers, and anyone else working with sexually exploited youth will have a client who could potentially be involved in a court case as a victim. Front-line workers need to be educated about the court process and the role they can play so that they avoid giving youth misinformation and can better support the process. The court process can be confusing and it is helpful for community workers to have clear information about the role that victim witnesses play, what will be asked of them, and what options they do and do not have. Additionally, public education about the criminal justice system should include information about the purpose of the criminal law, court process, sentencing goals, and the roles and responsibilities of police, Crown, judges and Victim Services workers.



### **Focus on the same goal**

One victim support person spoke about the importance of focusing on the micro agenda of getting through the individual court case successfully, rather than the macro agenda of seeking justice for all women and girls through one example. Many of the individuals we interviewed said that they believe the court process is not about finding justice for the victim, it is about proving the guilt of the offender. It is important that the victims understand that as a witness, their role is to give evidence to the best of their knowledge. The process that happens outside of the actual courtroom proceedings provides a place where that larger healing might be possible. As more cases go through the court system and more convictions are made, the larger goal of justice will begin to be addressed.

### **Training for police, crown, judges**

Some lawyers who have been working on violent crimes for a long time do understand the impact that this has on youth victims, but others need more education about the consequences that testifying can have on sexually exploited youth. Sensitivity training, cross-cultural training, and training around the effects of trauma would be helpful. Although it was recognized that the role of the prosecutor is not to be a social worker, it is also important that they be sensitive to the challenges facing the victims.

### **Be realistic**

It is important to acknowledge that the court process will be long and trying, and will not be easy on the victims. Additionally, victims should not be told to expect “justice” or a sense of victory when the case is finished, especially as the outcome of the case could leave them feeling like they failed if the accused gets a lesser sentence than expected or is found not guilty.

### **Long-term effects**

While the court cases were successful in their conviction of individuals who sexually exploited and physically abused youth, participants felt that the cases did not result in many positive changes for the youth themselves. Key informants said that some youth actually found themselves more entrenched in their addictions and street involvement after the trauma of going through the court process.

### **Post-court support and follow up**

Those who were more closely involved with supporting the youth through the court process felt that more follow up or long-term support for the victims was needed. As one participant stated, “You need to transition them back into the community as best you can in some way”. If funding is put in place for the duration of the court process, efforts must be made to transition the youth out of that support system in to another means of support.

Victims need multiple opportunities to debrief after the court process with one or more members of the core support team. They also need long-term access to funding for

#### **Long-term Support**

*They don't go through that stuff and then all of a sudden go back to school and be happy little schoolgirls. No, it isn't going to happen.*

*I feel a sense that for the community's sake we got a predator off the street but for the victims themselves, my heart goes out to them because I think we should've done more for them.*

counseling because the effects of the case may still be unraveling years later when they have a family or exit street life.

### **Community list**

A list of community workers who would be willing to support court cases such as these should be kept up to date. This includes such things as housing resources, counselors, drug and alcohol treatment and detox, health care, and victim service workers who are particularly knowledgeable about working with sexually exploited youth. New resources for sex workers in the Prince George area include New Hope and PEERS Prince George, but neither service is directed at youth.

### **Follow up**

*There's a time when you do have to sever some of this, but I don't know if it's right after the trial. You know maybe give it a few months...try to orchestrate something with the Ministry to say "Help us out or let's work together".*

### **Developing a community protocol or training**

In order to learn from the key people involved in these cases, such as the police and Crown Counsel, it would be useful for them to create a community protocol or training modules that include all of the aspects of these successful cases. Funding could be made available for members of the core support team to work together to create a step-by-step guide for future cases that may emerge. This is particularly timely because many of the core team members have moved on to other positions (or have retired).

### **Court procedure with youth victims**

It was recommended that more work be done on how mechanisms that are used in sexual abuse cases can be used in cases with sexually exploited youth. Research could extend to the differences in international standards for using screens and other protective measures in cases involving child or youth victims. For example, one participant thought that the English criminal justice system provided good examples of measures for protecting vulnerable witnesses, including the consideration of the victim's psychological wellbeing. Since these interviews were conducted, Parliament has made changes to the *Criminal Code* and the *Canada Evidence Act* through Bill C-2, making the criminal justice system more effective in protecting children and youth under 18 years from violence and sexual exploitation. The new law significantly increases penalties for those who abuse children and encourages the use of special accommodations for children and other vulnerable witnesses in giving their testimony. This is one significant step towards encouraging witnesses to come forward with their complaints of criminal activity in their communities.

### **Cross-cultural Work**

*It's not just that you are aware that the people do things differently. You actually have to suspend your own belief system and that's a frightening place to go, to suspend my own belief system so that I'm not just kind of paying lip service to what they're doing.*

### **Working with First Nations**

Given the reality that there is a vast number of sexually exploited youth are Aboriginal, those working with victims need to take cultural differences in to account where appropriate. It is important that support workers are sensitive to the cultural differences in Aboriginal communities and how they may

affect the process of communication during the trial. Aboriginal youth should have the option of meeting with an elder, participating in traditional cleansing ceremonies, and otherwise involving their Aboriginal community. Having a strong, visible Aboriginal presence in the Crown Counsel’s office or the courtroom was also suggested.

**Communication**

Within the core investigative team, communication and sharing information is key. Being able to discuss the case in order to support one another and be clear about the process is important. However, people outside of that core team need to be aware that talking about the case outside of the team context may jeopardize the case or their working relationship with the victims. In Prince George, part of the success of these cases was due to a lack of gossiping or discussing the case outside of appropriate contexts.

**Heal the wounds of funding cuts**

In Prince George, recent funding cuts have eliminated important positions in the community, such as the sexually exploited youth outreach worker and housing project. Without these programs, the community is lacking programs that address the specific needs of sexually exploited youth.

*For me it was a huge learning experience going “Wow.. There isn’t much out there for these women”*

## **Section D: Provincial Recommendations and Next Steps**

### **Coordinated Efforts: Creating a Standard of Care for Victims**

Across British Columbia, key informants, youth and experiential adults talked about the need for a coordinated attempt to address violence against sexually exploited youth and adult sex workers. Front line workers are the first point of contact for most victims, and they need to have more information about the justice system in order to assist victims in bringing their cases forward to the police. The development of a guidebook or set of standards for bringing these cases forward would assist in this process. Each community should have a standard procedure or designated person within the police who receives reports from these victims and who has the skills and knowledge to deal with them respectfully and sensitively.

### **Valuing Specialized Knowledge**

Existing programs across BC should be deepened in order to make use of the specialized knowledge of people who have been working with issues of sexual exploitation and sex work for many years. Rather than creating new services to address these issues, key informants felt that efforts should focus on strengthening the programs that already exist through providing ongoing funding to support their efforts.

### **Multi-Level Education**

Each community is unique in its level of education on and awareness of issues of the sex trade, sexual exploitation and dealing with violence against those involved in the sex trade. Education is needed at all of these levels, including:

- basic training about working with sexually exploited youth, the impact of trauma, intergenerational abuse
- information about bringing together a team of service providers to support victims through the court process
- information about the justice system

In each of the communities it was clear that there is a need for public education about the justice system. Public education is needed so that youth and adults know their legal rights and understand how the justice system works.

### **Example of the role of education**

**Charge Approval:** In BC, the police investigate and gather evidence of a crime, such as the sexual assault and exploitation of a youth. If there is sufficient evidence, the police will prepare a report to Crown Counsel outlining which charge or charges they think should be considered for prosecution. Crown Counsel will review the police report and all the circumstances of the case in order to decide whether to approve charges.

Generally, before charges are approved, Crown Counsel must be able to say "yes" to two questions based on the available evidence: one, is there a substantial likelihood of conviction and two, does the public interest require a prosecution.

### **Education within the Justice System**

Multi-level education is needed within the justice system on the unique needs of victims who have been sexually exploited or work in the sex trade. While some judges and Crown Counsel have developed a deep level of knowledge about working with these victims, others may need additional sensitivity training to handle these cases effectively. One possibility is to have peer-based training in which judges and Crown Counsel with particular knowledge in these areas could work to educate others in their field. Additionally, the involvement of an experiential adult who has particular knowledge of the justice system would be useful in this process.

### **Peer education**

One suggested strategy was to develop peer education programs in which youth who have been through a court case could help to develop tools for other youth on going through this process. This should be done with attention to the youth's coping skills and distance from the case, in conjunction with counseling and other healing therapies. Peer education is also effective in doing street outreach, peer education on violence, and violence prevention. Programs which use these models (such as TCO2) should be made more available to small rural and northern communities. Initiatives could also be undertaken in rural communities to initiate or support existing programs with peer models on violence prevention.

### **Cross Cultural Competence**

In addition to being familiar with youth sub-cultures, it is important that service providers are offered opportunities to strengthen their ability to work across racial and other cultural differences. In recognition of the unique needs of Aboriginal youth, training in culturally appropriate service provision would benefit the work of programs across BC. Additionally, creating greater levels of competence for programs to work with immigrant and visible minority youth would improve overall accessibility and effectiveness of existing programs.

### **Youth-Savvy Services**

All of the people we interviewed were aware of the gap between the norms of youth cultures and those of larger society in which programs and services are designed. Service providers must work to stay on top of youth culture, and to offer services that are in line with the realities youth are facing in their communities. This is a particular challenge to legal and governmental systems that operate within set frameworks and may not be flexible to the needs of youth.

As well, service providers are most successful when they are aware of the language youth use to talk about their lives. Youth talked about having their own terms for safety, as well as for abuse or exploitation, and the adults in their lives need to speak in these terms or at least understand them.

### **Boys, Men and Transgender People**

In all communities, the focus of programming and service provision is girls and women, with little knowledge about the roles of males. More programs must be developed to look at the particular place of sexually exploited boys and male sex trade workers. Additionally, interest was expressed in focusing more on preventing young men from becoming offenders, johns, pimps and recruiters. We must begin to ask the questions: how are boys being recruited? How is violence used against boys during the recruitment process? Are boys recruiting other boys? How do men become pimps and recruiters?

Additionally, transgender youth (specifically male-to-female transsexuals) are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and more work should be done to look specifically at their experiences of violence and their service needs. Ignorance about transgender and transsexual people provides an additional layer of discrimination which prevents these individuals from accessing the justice system and formal support services, including health care, counseling and exiting supports.

### **Strengthening the Role of the Police**

During this research, we spoke with members of the police across BC who showed extreme commitment to building cases against those who abuse sex trade workers and sexually exploited youth. Some factors which would help strengthen the ability of the police to do this are:

- Where possible, police should have long-term placements in a community, in recognition that individuals will trust them if they have time to build a good reputation and relationships within the community.
- Need for police, especially those investigating sex crimes or crimes against youth, to do community outreach and become more approachable.
- Police should be enabled to be more flexible in where they meet with victims. Many victims will not go to a police station no matter how dire the situation. Police must be able to meet with victims in a neutral place, including a park or community agency office. In the words of one officer, “We spoke in an unmarked car, in a park, where ever they felt comfortable with it and then from there we would meet on a neutral level where it was just a place to talk...Whatever occurred it was always asking them first, not me deciding.”
- Police should receive training from individuals who have worked in the sex trade and can speak to the issues they face while working both on the street or in indoor venues.

### **Court Case Processes and Successful Convictions**

Court cases often proceed very slowly and this can cause added stress for the victims and witnesses. One step that would help this process is to expedite court cases to move more quickly through the system, especially if the cases involve victims who have been sexually exploited. More successful cases may also create more willingness for others to come forward and speak out.

### **Treating Sexual Exploitation as Sexual Abuse**

Although it is well known that sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse, the court system does not always treat victims with protective measures that are available. Using video conferencing and other measures that are used for vulnerable witnesses in sexual abuse trials would be appropriate for cases involving sexually exploited youth. Additionally, sexually exploited youth should be made more aware of sexual assault centres and other specialized programs that are in place to support victims of sexual abuse. As previously mentioned, Bill C-2 was recently introduced to make changes to the *Criminal Code* and the *Canada Evidence Act*, increasing protection for children and youth from violence and sexual exploitation. These changes include increased penalties for offenders and encouraging the use of special accommodations for children and other vulnerable witnesses in giving their testimony.

### **Long-term support**

Systems need to be developed to ensure that long-term support is provided to victims after a court case is vanished. Support after a court case should be consistent for a reasonable period of time. Programs should be developed so that this support is always provided to sexually exploited youth victims, especially those who have been in the care of the ministry. Rather than seeking special funding, a process should be put in place to ensure that supports are available for a reasonable amount of time during court processes.

## **Appendix 1: Contributors**

### **Project Coordination**

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Barbara Smith, PEERS Victoria  
Suzanne Simpson, Women's Sexual Assault Centre

## Appendix 2: Research Question Guides

### Prince George Key Informant Interviews

The purpose of this interview is to find out more about the major issues, concerns and themes which arose from the successful court cases in Prince George which involved sexually exploited youth as victims.

I would like to remind you to provide examples and speak to your experience without naming specific youth involved in the cases. If you work for an agency that has guidelines about confidentiality, those may be useful in your decisions about how much information to share with us in this interview. You can also skip questions that you do not wish to answer.

If this interview process leaves you feeling like you would like to debrief with someone, Susie Wheeler has offered to be available for that purpose.

- 1) What is your position and title? (If you feel comfortable)
- 2) What are your general duties?
- 3) What has been your involvement in cases with victims who were sexually exploited youth? Did you work above and beyond your official position in these cases? (In answering this question you can be as general or as specific as you like)
- 4) What would say are the key themes associated with these cases? What made these cases unique?
- 5) Did you feel satisfied with the outcome of these cases?
- 6) What impact did these cases have on you? (personal, professional)
- 7) How much time did you spend on these cases? Did this time extend beyond the expectations of your employer?
- 8) What percentage (greater or less) did these cases take compared to adult victim cases? (If applicable)
- 9) Were the resources sufficient to meet the requirements of these cases? If not, what resources were needed? What resources are needed to make these types of cases successful? What elements are critical in your perspective?
- 10) How did the relationships with other agencies and individuals impact your involvement in the case?

11) What role did victim service workers play in these cases? Did you find it useful to have the assistance of victim service workers?

12) How would you describe your own sense of well-being during these cases?

- No different from other cases
- More stressful than other case
- Less stressful than other cases

What was important in maintaining a sense of health and wellbeing during these cases? Has your employer put anything in place for self-care?

13) What recommendations would you make to improve the criminal justice system in cases such as these?

14) What do you see as some of the short-term and long-term effects of violence in these types of cases? (emotional, mental, physical effects)

15) What do you see as some of the main barriers preventing these cases from proceeding through the court system?

16) What needs to change in order for these barriers to shift to make this process easier on the youth victims?

17) What are some of the particular needs of sexually exploited youth as they move through the court system, pre-, during and post- court?

What are some of the particular needs of service providers as they assist sexually exploited youth as they move through the court system?

18) Once the court case is finished, what kinds of support or follow up do sexually exploited youth need? What do service providers need? Have these follow-up needs been met in the cases you have been involved in?

19) Would you make any recommendations about the involvement of First Nations organizations or culturally-specific services for Aboriginal youth who are involved in cases such as these?

20) What information do youth already have about the justice system? How can youth become better informed about the justice system so that they will know what to expect as a victim witness?

21) What could help to build a better relationship between youth, the police and the justice system?

22) Do you have access to bulletins, resources, and other materials that may have helped you through these cases? If not, why not, and what would you find useful?

## RESEARCH QUESTION GUIDE – YOUTH

- Introduce the researchers and co-researchers, the project, review confidentiality, who will get to see transcriptions and reporting – check for competence/understanding of consent.
- Mention reportable information – doing harm to yourself or to others, ongoing abuse (for youth).
- We will take time to do post-counseling or debriefing if required. Also discuss supports available in community.
- We will use notes and audiotape.
- These questions are about your life in the present tense, however please feel free to comment on past experience in the sex trade.
- Give out resource list with info about counseling, support, etc.
- Sign consent form

### Internal and Informal Resources

- What is safety to you? What makes you feel safe? (How do you define safety?)
- How do you define violence? What is violence? What do you think of as violence?
- What creates or contributes to a sense of safety in your life, your community? (whatever community you most see yourself belonging to)
- What attitudes about violence do you see around you? From community, media, police, or public (ie: when you are walking down the street?)
- Have you noticed any recent changes in the types or amount of violence in your community? Why do you think this is?
- What does zero tolerance mean to you?
- What do you currently do to keep yourself safe?
  - When you walk down the street?
  - In your home?
  - In every day life?
  - What does safety look like in your life?
- What have you done to cope or survive?
- Have you experienced fear or threat of violence?
- What does violence look like in your life?
  - Where does violence happen?
  - What kinds of violence?
  - What impact does this have on you (physical, emotional, monetary, where you are able to work, live, walk?)
  - Who experiences violence in your community?
- What makes you at risk of violence?
  - Who in your community and group of friends is most at risk of being a victim of violence? (prompt: How might differences in race, gender, ability, class, etc. impact on your risk of violence? Do you feel like there is a difference because of race or gender?)

- What do you do when you feel afraid or threatened?
  - How does this differ for various types of problems you might experience (on the street, at home, etc) ? (everyday rituals, self care, coping mechanisms)
  - What do you see as your coping mechanisms or strengths when you face a problem?
- Do you think you have the ability to report crimes or violence like anyone else?
  - Would you ever report a violent crime against you?
  - Do you think you would be taken seriously?
  - Would you be afraid of being seen as a “rat”?
- What gets in the way of reporting a crime or violent incident?
  - How do the views or attitudes of police, social workers, victim service workers and others impact on your decision to report violence against you?
  - Has your experience with police influenced your feelings about reporting?
- If you knew someone who was the victim of violence, and could imagine the perfect way for it to be dealt with, what would it look like? What would happen in an ideal world if someone needed to report a violent crime?

### **External and Formal Support and Reporting**

- Who would you call in the middle of the night if you needed help?
- What safety supports are you aware of or do you access? Who do you feel safe talking to about experiences of violence? What makes them safe to talk to?
  - Do you talk about different things with different people?
  - How did you find them or how did they come to you?
  - What associations, organizations or groups have been especially helpful to you in the past?
  - What organizations or services have made you feel unwelcome?
- Who do your friends talk to about being scared of or experiencing violence?
- If you have had a **health concern** as a result of experiencing violence where do you go for help? (eg. Bruising, bleeding, fear of pregnancy, disease, hepC, etc).
- Do you feel comfortable talking to the doctor/nurse, ambulance attendant, paramedic, police about trauma or violence you have experienced? What would make you feel more comfortable talking to them?
- Has anything violent happened to you that you wish you had told someone about? What would have to happen to make you feel like you could tell someone about it?
- If you have been a victim of crime or a violent incident, were any services available to you to help you report it to the police?
  - If so, how was your experience talking to the police?
  - What support do you need when reporting a violent incident to police?
  - What support do you need or would you need when you are involved in a court case where you have been a victim of violence?
  - What support might you need when the court case is finished?

### Closing Questions:

- Do you feel satisfied with the safety supports you currently have access to and what do you wish you had access to? (housing, health, detox, treatment, welfare, employment options, education, protection?)
- What changes (additions, omissions) would you like to see in your community and/or society to decrease violence and increase safety?
- What role does the media play in portraying violence or safety?
- How do you stay connected to people who support you? How can service providers stay connected with you?
- Are there any questions we didn't ask that we should have?
- Do you have any questions for us?

If any of you have a story to share, or would like to talk more in-depth and privately, we are available for follow-up 1:1 interviews

Address safety, payment, debriefing, counseling, referrals or follow-up.

## RESEARCH QUESTION GUIDE - ADULTS

- Introduce the researchers and co-researchers, the project, review confidentiality, who will get to see transcriptions and reporting – check for competence/understanding of consent.
- Mention reportable information – doing harm to yourself or to others
- We will take time to do post-counseling or debriefing if required. Also discuss supports available in community.
- We will use notes and audiotape.
- These questions are about your life in the present tense, however please feel free to comment on past experience in the sex trade.
- Give out resource list with info about counseling, support, etc.
- Sign consent form

### Internal and Informal Resources

- What is safety to you? What makes you feel safe? (How do you define safety?)
- How do you define violence? What is violence? What do you think of as violence?
- What creates or contributes to a sense of safety in your life, your community? (whatever community you most see yourself belonging to)
- What attitudes about violence do you see around you? From community, media, police, or public (ie: when you are walking down the street?)
- Have you noticed any recent changes in the types or amount of violence in your community? Why do you think this is?
- What do you currently do to keep yourself safe at work?
  - When you walk down the street?
  - In your home?
  - In every day life?
  - What does safety look like in your life?
- What have you done to cope or survive?
- Have you experienced fear or threat of violence?
- What does violence look like in your life?
  - Where does violence happen?
  - What kinds of violence?
  - What impact does this have on you (physical, emotional, monetary, where you are able to work, live, walk?)
  - Who experiences violence in your community?
- What makes you at risk of violence?
  - Who in your community and group of friends is most at risk of being a victim of violence? (prompt: How might differences in race, gender, ability, class, etc. impact on your risk of violence? Do you feel like there is a difference because of race or gender?)
- What do you do to deal with violence in general?
  - While at work?



- How does this differ for various types of violence you might experience (on the street, at home, etc)? (everyday rituals, self care, coping mechanisms)
- What do you see as your coping mechanisms or strengths when you face a problem?
- What do you currently do to take care of yourself after working (sex work)?
- Do you think you have the ability to report crimes or violence like anyone else?
  - Would you ever report a violent crime against you?
  - Do you think you would be taken seriously?
  - Would you be afraid of being seen as a “rat”?
- What gets in the way of reporting a crime or violent incident?
  - How do the views or attitudes of police, social workers, victim service workers and others impact on your decision to report violence against you?
  - Has your experience with police influenced your feelings about reporting?
- If you knew someone who was the victim of violence, and could imagine the perfect way for it to be dealt with, what would it look like? What would happen in an ideal world if someone needed to report a violent crime?

### **External and Formal Support and Reporting**

- Who would you call in the middle of the night if you needed help?
- What safety supports are you aware of or do you access? Who do you feel safe talking to about experiences of violence? What makes them safe to talk to?
  - Do you talk about different things with different people?
  - How did you find them or how did they come to you?
  - What associations, organizations or groups have been especially helpful to you in the past?
  - What organizations or services have made you feel unwelcome?
- Who do your friends talk to about being scared of or experiencing violence?
- If you have had a **health concern** as a result of experiencing violence where do you go for help? (eg. Bruising, bleeding, fear of pregnancy, disease, hepC, etc).
- Do you feel comfortable talking to the doctor/nurse, ambulance attendant, paramedic, police about trauma or violence you have experienced? What would make you feel more comfortable talking to them?
- Has anything violent happened to you that you wish you had told someone about? What would have to happen to make you feel like you could tell someone about it?
- If you have been a victim of crime or a violent incident, were any services available to you to help you report it to the police?
  - If so, how was your experience talking to the police?
  - What support do you need when reporting a violent incident to police?
  - What support do you need or would you need when you are involved in a court case where you have been a victim of violence?
  - What support might you need when the court case is finished?

Closing Questions:

- Do you feel satisfied with the safety supports you currently have access to and what do you wish you had access to? (housing, health, detox, treatment, welfare, employment options, education, protection?)
- What changes (additions, omissions) would you like to see in your community and/or society to decrease violence and increase safety?
- What role does the media play in portraying sex work and violence?
- How do you stay connected to people who support you? How can service providers stay connected with you?
- Are there any questions we didn't ask that we should have?
- Do you have any questions for us?

If any of you have a story to share, or would like to talk more in-depth and privately, we are available for follow-up 1:1 interviews

Address safety, payment, debriefing, counseling, referrals or follow-up.

## Guiding Questions for Individual Interviews With experiential youth and adults

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### Introduction to sexual exploitation/sex work

- **YOUTH:** Can you tell me a bit about the first time you traded sexual acts or favors for money/drugs/shelter, etc. What was going on in your life at the time?
- **ADULTS:** What first lead up to you becoming involved in sex work/prostitution? (prompt for school and education, displacement from family, family relationships)
  
- Family history: Do you have any (other) family members involved in the sex trade?
  
- Have you had a significant violent incident happen in your life? How did it impact you?
  
- Have you ever reported a violent incident that has happened to you or someone you know? If Yes, who did you report to and why?
  - can you tell us a bit about what made you decide to report this in contrast with other violence you might not report
  - what would justice look like in this case?

### Interconnected risk:

- Have you ever felt like you don't have a home or a place to stay?
- Have you ever dropped out of school? Did you go back?
- What have your interactions with the police been like?
- What have your interactions with doctors and nurses been like? (prompt for street nurses, emergency room at hospital, family doctor, youth clinic, needle exchange, etc)
- Have you ever been involved in a court case as an accused or as a victim?

### Internet Recruitment

- Have you ever met someone that you met on the internet? (if NO, skip ahead)
- Do you have friends who meet people on the internet?
- Do you know anyone who has had a bad experience meeting someone on the internet?

### Looking Back

- How have you managed to survive and/or thrive thus far? Given all the challenges you have had to contend with?
- How have you been able to rise to the challenges put before you?
- What was going on in your head as you faced these difficulties?
- What have you learned about yourself and your world during your struggles?

### Looking Forward

- What supports do you need to help you deal with violence in your life?
- What would have helped in the past?
- What do you think would help you feel safer in your life?

## Anonymous Participant Questionnaire

Please answer these questions and give back to one of the people interviewing you. Your answers are completely confidential and we ask that you do not put your name on this form. Your answers will help us to get a better picture of who we have talked to for this research.

**What is your date of birth?**

(Month/Day/Year)

**Where were you born?**

(City, country)

**What is the last grade of school that you completed? (circle answer)**

I finished grade 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

**What is your racial or ethnic background?**

(Examples: First Nations, mixed-race, Chinese, African-Canadian, Scottish, white, Asian, etc)

**What is your gender? (circle answer)**

Male Female Transgender MTF FTM Two-spirit  
Other:

**What is your sexual orientation? (circle answer)**

Straight Gay Lesbian Bisexual Queer Other:

## Appendix 3: Checklist of Principles

### Innovative Practices and Guiding Principles Project Checklist

This is a checklist that you can use to ensure that you are addressing these principles in meeting the needs of experiential youth and adults in your research project. This list has been adapted from *Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Innovative Ideas for Working with Children and Youth*, and the CRIAW publication *Participatory Research and Action: A Guide to Becoming a Researcher for Social Change*.

PRINCIPLE	QUESTION	PROJECT RESPONSE
<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</b>	How are the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child reflected in our research practices and goals?	
<b>National Coalition of Experiential Women</b>	How are the principles of the National Coalition of Experiential Women reflected in our research practices and goals?	
<b>Participation of Experiential Youth and Adults</b>	Are experiential youth and adults given leadership roles in our project?	
	How are experiential youth and adults supported in taking leadership positions in our project?	
	Does our project have an advisory committee of experiential youth and adults?	
	To what extent are experiential youth and adults involved in decision making about the research they are participating in?	
	To what extent are experiential youth and adults empowered to make decisions about their own lives?	
	Are experiential youth and adults considered key stakeholders during evaluation of the project?	
<b>Collective Responsibility</b>	Has our project created working partnerships with other members of the community who are addressing sexual exploitation and sex work?	
	Do we attempt to educate the broader community about issues impacting on the levels of violence in the lives of sexually exploited youth and adult sex workers?	
	Do we work with partners from other sectors in our work on violence?	
	Is our project informed about larger systems of power in society, such as law, education and colonization?	
<b>Equity of access to services</b>	Do experiential youth and adults feel they can approach our project without being judged?	
	Do youth have voluntary participation in our research project?	

	How is a youth perspective incorporated in to our strategies for accessibility for youth?	
	Do our research practices create barriers to accessing our project?	
	How do we let experiential youth and adults know about our research project? Are there any gaps in our outreach?	
	Are we aware of all the Aboriginal communities in our area? How are we engaging with them in an accessible manner?	
	How does our project make experiential youth and adults feel welcome?	
<b>Culturally specific programming</b>	How do we ensure that our project is free from judgment toward experiential youth and adults?	
	How do we train our researchers to ensure sensitivity to the diverse needs of participants?	
	How do we address homophobia, racism, ageism, and other forms of discrimination in our research project?	
	Do we offer culturally-specific opportunities for participants? Do we offer gender-specific opportunities for participants?	
	Do we conduct our research project in a manner that addresses the specific cultural needs of youth from diverse communities?	
<b>Relational perspective</b>	Is there room in our project for workers to get to know the participants and to maintain contact with them?	
	Does the project work to foster naturally evolving relationships?	
	Does our project honour the relationships that participants already have within their peer groups, families, and communities?	
<b>Respecting First Nations Communities</b>	Have First Nations communities been given an opportunity to collaborate on the research in their community?	
	Have First Nations communities been engaged adequately in outreach for participation in the research project?	
<b>Self-Reflective Practice</b>	Does the project allow for continued reflection, evaluation and critique of ourselves as community researchers?	

## Appendix 4: Sample Support Roles and Court Case Timeline

	ROLES		TIMELINE
SAMPLE COURT CASE TIMELINE AND SUPPORT ROLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community supports and services: drug and alcohol counselors, sexual assault counselors, needle exchange, outreach, street nurse, social worker, teacher, youth and family worker, etc. who may receive disclosure</li> <li>• RCMP work with front-line workers, meet with youth, receive reports and rumors</li> <li>• RCMP works with one of above community support to get statements from youth involved</li> <li>• Prosecutor working with RCMP, support person, and youth to gather information for successful preliminary trial</li> <li>• AG or Provincial ministries providing necessary resources for housing, clothes, counseling, support, etc.</li> <li>• Key support person is chosen by youth and given funding for position</li> <li>• Court support or prosecutor orients youth to court process</li> <li>• Support people try to help youth get clean, show up for appointments and court cares, secure housing, food, clothing, etc.</li> <li>• Possibility of needing one-on-one support for detox, traveling for medical treatment or a&amp;d counseling</li> <li>• Team of support people ensure works with core team, to reaffirm importance of the case, to believe her, to encourage and provide support to one another</li> <li>• Detox, D&amp;A treatment, counseling</li> <li>• Ongoing community services that youth accessed prior to trial, such as street nurse, needle exchange, etc.</li> <li>• Post-court support and debriefing consistent with the level of support during the case</li> </ul>	↑ 0 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence, sexual assault or exploitation occurs</li> <li>• Rumors surface, make their way to police and service providers</li> <li>• Victim discusses incidents with service provider/friend/family</li> <li>• RCMP investigate rumors but cannot find victim willing to make statement</li> <li>• Report made to RCMP by service provider who has had disclosure</li> </ul>
		↑ two years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RCMP keep building trust and one youth agrees to make a statement</li> <li>• Find further witnesses and collect statements, hand over to Crown Council</li> <li>• Waiting</li> <li>• Preliminary trial</li> <li>• Waiting</li> </ul>
		↑ four years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trial</li> <li>• Conviction</li> <li>• Post court support (ongoing)</li> </ul>