

Anti-Human Trafficking Symposium

Steps Towards Prevention

March 10, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Through ORCC's renewal process, we have been learning about, and working to hold space for discussions of systemic change. Throughout our work, we see structures and systems at play, but we are often unable to take the time to challenge them due to the demands of overlapping crises, short-term project-based funding, and because there has been little capacity or guidance for collective social consciousness in anti-trafficking spaces.

In the past few decades, community organizations that address violence, including the anti-trafficking movement, have focused heavily on individual representations of and responses to violence. Though it is crucial that we continue to address the unique and diverse needs of individuals who experience violence, we also know that this work can remain caught in an emergency response cycle. When violence is decontextualized and disconnected from broader structures and systems, we struggle to get to the root of these issues.

We also know this is partly by design. The progressive deconstruction of the social safety net, or welfare state retrenchment, enforces an individualized perspective. When government mandates and affiliated funding sources narrow their scope to responses to violence that focus on the individual rather than the systemic roots, dominant anti-violence discourse becomes accordingly narrowed. At the same time, the limited, project-based funding for social supports creates a disjointed response to violence, making emergent crises appear unpredictable and unrelated.

Amid these current overlapping crises, continued erosion of the welfare state, and with organizations stretched thin, we know there is minimal opportunity and energy for building solidary networks and advancing collective action. We deeply appreciate the time and investment that community members have made into this learning and discussions, and recognize that this is time away from other pressing priorities.

We understand that a focus on systemic change can be difficult when there are countless crises that we face on a daily basis. We want to acknowledge the importance of advocating for more immediate supports, particularly for historically underserved communities, but also want to reiterate that the purpose of this Working Group is to actively keep our gaze at the systemic level of change. As noted by Nonomura (2020):

An intersectional analysis of human trafficking presents the challenge and promise of recognizing the unique combinations of factors that shape each experiencer's story, while also drawing critical attention to systems of violence that underly these "common factors." In other words, while the refrain that "it can happen to anyone" is nonetheless true in the strictest sense, a deeper analysis is needed in order address how and why human trafficking appears to "happen to" Black and Indigenous women and girls, and women and girls of colour, in different proportions, and through different processes, than others (Native Women's Association of Canada [NWAC], 2014; Philips 2015). Such an analysis must extend its scope beyond individual-level "risky behaviours" and abstract socio-demographic "risk factors" of experiencers (e.g., NCPC, 2013). It also must extend beyond a paradigm of simply criminalizing "perpetrators" and "johns" who, whatever may be said of their moral conduct, do not alone produce the conditions of racial, colonial, sexual, and economic dehumanization that lie at the historical and systemic roots of human trafficking in Canada (Bernstein, 2010; Bryant-Davis and Tummala-Narra, 2017; Nelson-Butler, 2015; Kempadoo, 2008, 2015; Kaye, 2017) (pp. 10-11).

We are excited to share highlights from our engagements and have created a draft Action Plan that we hope will provide a framework for concrete, actionable steps towards real change. Before we move into steps towards action, we will provide a quick overview of the current context that affects human trafficking at a systemic level.

Current Context: Neoliberalism

In the early 1990s, the social service sector shifted its approach to focus on the individual and their actions. This adoption of a neoliberal governance structure placed an emphasis on "a reduced state, minimal social programmes, the end of universal entitlements and empowered markets" (Brodie, 2008, p. 154). Additionally, broader "[s]ocial and political problems [have been] redefined as individual problems, best managed through responsibility and self-regulation," while removing all awareness of structures of power and systems of oppression (Gotell, 2010, p. 5).

Gotell further explains the impact of this neoliberal shift on feminist anti-violence efforts:

Now preoccupied with the rights of individualized 'victims', new policy discourses avoid systemic constructions linking 'crime' to context, signaling the disappearance of gendered policy discourses of sexual violence. The withdrawal of funding from feminist front-line and activist work is a crucial aspect of this reconfigured context. With the decline of federal support for Canadian women's organizations, funding for anti-rape activism and front-line work has been decentralized to the provinces. Because new funding arrangements are increasingly contingent on the provision of services to generic victims of crime, feminist front-line organizations have had to redefine themselves as social service delivery agencies, affecting their capacity to intervene in national debate and to combat the pervasive re-privatization and individualization of sexualized violence (Beres, Crow & Gotell 2009). (2010, pp. 9-10)

Community organizations have been forced to abandon broader systemic advocacy efforts and shift their focus to individual responses to violence, "in order to secure at least some of the dwindling federal funds designated for gender-based initiatives" (Brodie, 2008, p. 156). This shift has created a cycle of emergency crisis response that leaves little to no capacity to collaborate across sectors or address the broader systemic roots of violence. As noted by one participant, "I would love to talk about systemic stuff all day, but we're dealing with crises." Without adequate state supports, the expectations placed on community organizations to manage these crises has become unsustainable, and unmanageable. Participants also noted that they feel they can't provide adequate supports, because they don't have capacity to be available 24/7. As a result, survivors are left with a patchwork of services, which may or may not align with their values; a framework that is neither safe nor inclusive for people seeking support.

Evans et al. highlight that "[e]xpanding social problems in the context of state offloading has meant increased demands on NPO [Non-Profit Organization] services but gener-ally without the benefit of staff levels to match demand growth. The pressure, consequently, has been for NPO workers to continuously do more for less (Reed and Howe 2000, 21-22)" (2005, p.89). Through the development of this Action Plan, we hope to dig into the everyday crises front-line service providers are managing and unpack what changes need to be made at a systemic level in order to reduce these pressures.

In addition to an unsustainable cycle of crisis response, we also see the impacts of neoliberal governance through challenges community organizations face around funding structure. Funding

dedicated to this sector is minimal and has experienced massive funding cuts over the last several decades. Additionally, the reliance on short-term project-based funding has not only “[i]ncreased government regulation of NPOs,” but actually “deflects attention away from the most significant aspect of accountability, the responsibility of the organisation ‘to the cause’ it was ‘established to benefit’ (McCambridge 2005, 3)” (Evans et al., 2005, p. 84). Between time dedicated to writing and submitting proposals, ‘stop and start’ programming, or competition between community organizations for funds, this funding structure cannot contribute to real change.

At a more local level, service providers have noticed a resurgence of conservative approaches to human trafficking (HT) in Ottawa. There has been a lot of focus around the Act Means Purpose (AMP) model, grooming, luring as well as a heavy emphasis on policing responses and involvement in HT cases. These approaches, in conjunction with a focus on the individual, and suppressing systemic approaches to change have created a cycle of crisis management that is driving front-line service providers to burnout. As one participant notes, “I feel useless at this point, because it is like treating gaping wounds with a gift card.” There is a critical and immediate need to change our approach so we may better support all who are affected by HT

Current Context: Seeing Violence as an Expression of Systemic Power & Domination

At ORCC, we believe sexual violence is the product of domination and oppression, which is present and replicated in numerous structures and systems. As noted by Collins (2017), “[r]acism, sexism, heterosexism, capitalism, nationalism and similar systems of power all rely on violence to sustain domination” (p. 1466). More specifically, we see human trafficking as “the continuation of a long history of racialized sexual violence, oppression and labour exploitation” which continues to be shaped by current “racially and culturally marginalizing policies” (Nonomura, 2020, p.8). In our work, we are seeking to address the power imbalances in society to ensure that fewer and fewer people experience violence.

As noted by Nonomura (2020), “meaningful and effective solutions must confront the ways that heteropatriarchy, racism and colonialism are inscribed in human trafficking” (p.4-5). While we acknowledge there are many other overlapping systems of power that contribute to human trafficking, this report will focus on colonialism, heteropatriarchy and racism. While these systems of

oppression are discussed separately, it's important to remember that these forms of oppression do not operate independently. As noted by Nonomura (2020), "systemic violence often takes place along *more than a single 'axis' of oppression*" reinforcing the interconnected nature of these systems of power and domination (p. 7).

Colonialism

Settler colonialism is the process where an "imperial power claims the land of the colony and then works to progressively eliminate the native population so they can be replaced with settlers" (Roxburgh, 2021). It is a structure in which today's society, systems and ways of thinking have been built around (Wolfe, 2006). As Arvin et al., (2013) note, "[s]ettler colonialism is a persistent social and political formation in which newcomers/colonizers/settlers come to a place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to disappear the Indigenous peoples that are there" (p. 12).

According to Hunt (2015), "colonial power relations...are, and always have been, inherently gendered" (p. 26). Sexual violence has always been deeply rooted in colonial violence, and frames Indigenous women and girls as "being acceptable, disposable targets for colonial oppression" (S. Roxburgh, unrecorded presentation, Feb 2, 2023, Bourgeois, 2015). This gendered, colonial violence can be seen today through alarming rates of violence, homicide, police violence, child removal, incarceration, sexual exploitation and trafficking experienced by Indigenous women and girls (Trocmé et al., 2004; Palmater, 2016; Roudometkina & Wakeford, 2018). It can be seen through the normalization of violence, and apathetic responses to this violence by media and the justice system; sending the message that Indigenous people are less valuable and less deserving of support than non-Indigenous people (Bourgeois, 2015; Palmater, 2016; Gilchrist, 2010).

Both historical and contemporary colonial practices have set the foundation for trafficking of Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people. For example, Indigenous people were "bought and sold as chattel in Canada until the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1834, and the legacy of slavery has endured with respect to Aboriginal women in a particular way. The assertion of ownership over Aboriginal women has manifested itself as a right for others (white male settlers) to determine the appropriate 'use' and value of Aboriginal women" (Sikka, 2010, p. 207).

However, slavery was not "the only factor[s] driving the correlation between Indigenous women and sexual availability and violability" (S. Roxburgh, unrecorded presentation, Feb 2, 2023). Settler

expansion, resource extraction and the destruction of traditional livelihoods (i.e., through extermination of natural resources), forced Indigenous communities to relocate to small pieces of land (Bourgeois 2015, S. Roxburgh, unrecorded presentation, Feb 2, 2023). In other words, this “colonial land theft, forced relocation, and confinement of indigenous peoples to reservations constituted human trafficking because it not only enabled the exploitation of indigenous lands and resources for the personal gain of colonial governments and white settlers by removing indigenous peoples, but also secured indigenous labour to be exploited within the colonial capitalist economy (again, to the personal gain of the colonial government and white settlers who controlled this economy)” (Bourgeois, 2015, p. 1451).

As Robyn Bourgeois (2015) points out, “by its own legal and conceptual definitions of human trafficking, the Canadian state has been and continues to be directly complicit in the human trafficking of indigenous women and girls” (p. 1433). Additional historical examples of this include the forcible removal of Indigenous children through the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop. Today, children continue to be removed from their families at alarming rates and placed in the child welfare system; a system that has been well-documented to have “a direct connection” to “the targeting of Indigenous girls for sexual exploitation” (Nonomura, 2020, p.10; Sikka, 2010).



As Roxburgh summarizes:

Indigenous experiences of trafficking are historical, they are political, social, economic, and ideational, they have been created by the colonial state and woven into the fabric of Canada. Trafficking is enmeshed in institutions, systems, and structures across our society. We've seen how media devalues, stigmatizes, and sexualizes Indigenous people, normalizing violence against them and supporting impunity keeping the secret of colonial violence. We have seen how reserves, forced relocations, Residential Schools, and the child welfare system have recruited and groomed generations of Indigenous peoples, isolating them, degrading them, destroying their support networks, subjecting them to extreme violence, and coercing them into silence.

We've seen how police and military forces as extension of the colonial state enact sexual violence, stand by and allow settlers to violence and murder Indigenous peoples, and advance discourses of safety, security, threat, and risk that normalize and conceal colonialism and their complicity. Together, these colonial processes create the ideal foundation for Indigenous human trafficking, a natural extension of the occupation and exploitation of Indigenous lands and peoples upon which Canada was built. (S. Roxburgh, unrecorded presentation, Feb 2, 2023).

Heteropatriarchy

Heteropatriarchy refers to social systems where “heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant and abhorrent” (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 13). Patriarchy can be “loosely defined as a power system organized around male authority and male privilege- [and which] constitutes a form of structural violence against women wherein there are systematic ways in which women are treated as inferior to men” (Benoit et al., 2015, p.6). These processes of power and domination are also experienced by 2SLGBTQIA+, and gender non-conforming individuals.

Active settler colonies, like Canada are “balanced upon notions of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy” (Arvin et al., 2013, p.9). As noted by Smith (2006), “in order to colonize peoples whose societies are not based on social hierarchy, colonizers must first naturalize hierarchy though instituting patriarchy. In turn, patriarchy rests on a gender binary system in which only two genders

exist, one dominating the other” (p. 72). Through this system of domination, where “[t]he political and economic order is largely controlled and shaped by men in societies around the globe,” men are more likely to perpetrate violence, as an expression of their greater power across these political, social and economic spaces (Harris, 2011, p.22). Targeting women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and gender non-conforming folks can also be a method for perpetrators of sexual violence to maintain the “status quo [i.e., maintaining their place of privilege] because they benefit from the ways systems are currently structured” (Linder, 2018, p. 10).

Heteropatriarchy works across systems to normalize violence against women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and gender non-conforming individuals. As noted by Benoit et al. (2015):

Patriarchy takes many forms in every day activities such as the routine ways in which women are sexualized in the popular media (i.e., television, film, and advertising) and portrayed as sexually available; the ways women are held to different sexual standards than men (as is the case with “slut shaming”); the ubiquitous jokes about wife-beating and sexual coercion; and indeed the salacious violence on television and in films wherein female victims are often shown as sexualized objects (Johnson, 1997) (p.6).

In tandem with other forms of oppression, heteropatriarchy perpetuates violence as a method of exerting power and control over those deemed ‘others,’ (i.e., those who fall outside of Eurocentric norms). This includes 2SLGBTQQIA+ and gender non-conforming individuals, which is evidenced by the higher and more extreme rates of violence experienced by these groups (Jaffray, 2020), and the disproportionate rates that women and girls are targeted by traffickers.

Racism

Racism can be described as the “prejudices held against a targeted racial or cultural group in addition to the societal power to dominate and marginalize members of that group” (Bryant-Davis & Tummala-Narra, 2017, p.153). As noted by Nonomura (2020), “racism and colonialism are recurring factors in sexual exploitation of women in Canada, including what is referred to as ‘human trafficking’” (p. 4). Tracing the racial roots of human trafficking leads to a closer look at how “[h]istorically, people of color have been systematically exploited and trafficked for sex” (Nelson-Butler, 2015, p.1469).

A specific example of this systematic exploitation is how slavery in Canada “normalized the sexual and labour exploitation” of Black and Indigenous women and girls (Nonomura, 2020, p. 8). As part of the

process to justify this exploitation, harmful stereotypes were constructed, so racialized women and girls were seen as sexually available objects that were less valuable and less human than White women (Nelson-Butler, 2015; de Finney, 2017). These stereotypes have been deeply embedded in society, at a structural level through media, the education system, child welfare system and the justice system (Bryant-Davis & Tummala-Narra, 2017; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018; CBC, 2022). This active process of dehumanizing and devaluing continues today and normalizes the “acceptability of trading, exploiting, and discarding” of racialized women and girls (Bryant-Davis & Tummala-Narra, 2017, p. 154).

However, beyond “stereotypes or victim blaming attitudes, cultural oppression exacerbates the risk for human trafficking through the denial of resource access. These resources include but are not limited to safe housing, a livable wage, education, safe childcare, and protection under the law” (Bryant-Davis & Tummala-Narra, 2017p. 157). These barriers to resources are also exacerbated at the intersection of neoliberalism and racism; where the removal and underfunding of universal state supports disproportionately impact racialized communities who have less political, social, and economic power as individuals in a society dominated by white supremacy.

In summary, racialized “women and girls are at increased risk to violence due in part to histories of colonial sex trafficking, exploitation, systematic prostitution, stereotypes, and low valued social roles (Shimizu, 2010)” (Bryant-Davis & Tummala-Narra, 2017 p. 155). Collins (2017) highlights how these processes are linked to contemporary policies and practices, noting that “ostensibly colourblind rules and regulations reinscribe social inequality as firmly as the use of force. In this context, violence did not disappear. Instead, it became embedded in the rules and became even more routinized via a system of seemingly non-discriminatory ideas and practices. State-sanctioned violence that is not defined as violence at all, yet that is essential in sustaining racial inequality persists, seemingly hidden in plain sight” (p. 1464). These systemic policies and practices are deeply rooted in racist ideologies and continue to play a key role in the targeted trafficking of racialized women, girls, 2SLGBTQIA+ and gender non-conforming individuals.

LOOKING FORWARD

In this Working Group, we are moving away from the idea that human trafficking is a pattern of violence made up by individual crimes, and looking at it as a “broader social problem emerging under specific historical and social conditions,” such as neoliberal governance, colonialism, heteropatriarchy and racism (Nonomura, 2020, p. 6). As Collins (2017) note, these intersecting layers of oppression “become hegemonic when they become critically embedded in the rules and regulations of normal society” (p. 1464). In other words, this violence has become normal and naturalized to the point that it can be difficult to see, or imagine a world without these structures in place.

As professionals in this space, we are stepping in to the responsibility of fighting these systems. We are making strides to take coordinated action against the depth of the crisis that we work in, and finally turn our attention to the bigger picture. This Working Group aims to think about the ways we can intervene so we can move away from managing one crisis at a time, and look towards making changes that collectively benefits survivors.

On March 10th, participants expressed that “you don’t have time to dream. If you’re doing the work, you don’t have the opportunity to connect with each other and have these conversations.” We also heard that trying to make changes at the systemic level can be isolating. Together, we can change that. Together, we can work towards healthier and safer communities.

“When we talk about a world without prisons; a world without police violence; a world where everyone has food, clothing, shelter, quality education; a world free of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, heterosexism; we are talking about a world that doesn’t currently exist. But collectively dreaming up one that does means we can begin building it into existence... That is why decolonization of the imagination is the most dangerous and subversive decolonization process of all.” (Imarisha, 2015 p.1 in Karcher, 2016, p. 4)

Action Plan Framework

Area of Focus: Housing

Current Context

- We are in the midst of an affordable housing crisis; Ottawa city council declared a housing and homelessness emergency in 2020
- Not enough affordable units are being built, and we are also losing affordable units to private companies/Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT)
- Private Funding/Investments/'Rent Greed'
- Major lack of services, particularly in rural areas
- [Life After Neoliberalism in Canada: How Policy Creates Homelessness and How Citizenship Models Fail to Provide Solutions](#)
 - Provides a summary of defunding over time

Case Studies

- Housing First Model
- [Addressing Canada's Lack of Affordable Housing](#)
 - Outlines numerous housing funding models
- City of Montreal purchasing rentals and turning them over to non-profit housing providers ([CBC](#), [Montreal Housing initiative](#))
- BC and Quebec [Promising Practices](#)
- [Promising Practices: 12 Case Studies in Supportive Housing for People with Mental Health and Addiction Issues](#)

Advocates

- [Alliance to End Homelessness](#)
- [Ottawa Community Land Trust](#)
- [Vote Housing Coalition](#)

Action Items

- Letters/support to coalitions noted above

- Joint letter to City Council

Area of Focus: Health

Current Context

- There is little to no preventative mental health supports
- Access to physician care is *extremely* rare
- It's unclear 'who is responsible' for mental health
- There is a heavy emphasis on clinical, Eurocentric responses to mental health issues. Mental health supports need to be destigmatized and decolonized

Case Studies

- [Government of Saskatchewan and Mental Health First Aid](#)

Advocates

- [CMHA](#)
- [Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition](#)
- [Mental Health Coalition of Canada](#)

Action Items

- Make a joint statement outlining how restricted access to health supports is related to HT
- Reach out to advocates to see what initiatives they are pushing for and tie that in with HT priorities
 - Discuss with advocates the benefits of advocating for expanded universal health care (to include mental health promotion and care) and what kind of mental health initiatives we could propose for the education system

Area of Focus: Drugs & Decriminalization

Current Context

- There is a reluctance across all levels of government to deal with the current drug overdose crisis. BC was granted an exemption at the Federal level, but Toronto applied at the same time and has been waiting for a response.
- There is a heavier emphasis (again, at all levels of government) on intensifying policing the use of drugs, criminalization of users

Case Studies

- [British Columbia](#)
- [Portugal](#)
- [SOS: Safer Opioid Supply](#)

Advocates

- [Ottawa Inner City Health](#)
- [Canadian Association of People Who Use Drugs](#)

Action Items

- Joint letter to city council to make naloxone accessible everywhere (as PPE was at the height of the pandemic, and/or included with AED sites); on the streets, OC Transpo etc.; more drug testing sites; more safe consumption sites and providing education at health sites
- Letter to the province, Health Minister of Canada (and/or city council, [since Toronto has tried to apply](#) but with less success) advocating for the decriminalization of drug possession
- Attend [events hosted by CAPUD](#)

Area of Focus: Guaranteed Basic Income

Current Context

- In response to the pandemic and CERB, discussions around UBI/GBI have resurfaced; [Is basic income dead in Ontario, or just sleeping?](#)
- With inflation and time to reflect on CERB's impact, this is good timing

- There are a lot of case studies and research demonstrating success; including health and wellness improvements

Case Studies

- [Ontario Basic Income Pilot](#)
- [Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration \(SEED\)](#) -United States
- [Mincome](#)

Advocates

- [Ontario Basic Income Network; Basic Income Now Ottawa](#)
- [UBI Works](#)
 - [Bill S-233 An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income](#)
 - Introduced by Kim Pate and Leah Gazan
 - [Factsheet](#)

[Action Items](#)

- Meet with Basic Income Now Ottawa and emphasize connection to HT survivors

Consideration of Discourse

- Keeping our focus at the systemic level (and moving away from an individual focus)
- Maintaining Cultural Sensitivity
- Humanizing Discourse
 - While we are working at the systemic level, it's important to remember that this movement is ultimately still working to improve the lives of community members
- Striking a balance between maintaining the complexity of these problems, while also making knowledge of these root causes accessible

Additional Areas of Focus: Strengthening the Sector

- Supporting each other as service providers

- While we continue to face the reality of being caught in a cycle of crisis response, let's remember to check in with each other and keep these cautiously optimistic discussions moving forward
- Advocating for Core Funding
 - Long-term, flexible funding can be one method of building capacity in this sector to do this work.

Broad Action Plan Strategies

- Letters to Existing Coalitions
- Direct Action (Letter on Safe Supply, Drug Testing & Harm Reduction in General)
- Attending Relevant Conferences
- Survivor Consultation
- Redirecting Discourse (HT Discourse Exploitation)
- Public Joint Statement
 - First statement will be around the need to reframe HT and rebuild welfare state

Next Steps for Discussion

- Sustainability
 - How can we continue the momentum we've created in this group?
- Sharing Responsibility
 - Are there certain individuals/organizations that might be better situated to address certain areas of focus and/or lead action for specific activities (drafting letters, community building etc.)?
- Scaling Messaging
 - What are some key messages we would like to disseminate across different audiences?
- Survivor Consultation
 - Are we including survivor input on these activities? If so, how can we do this in a good way to ensure we are maintaining a systemic approach and not exploiting survivor experiences?

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