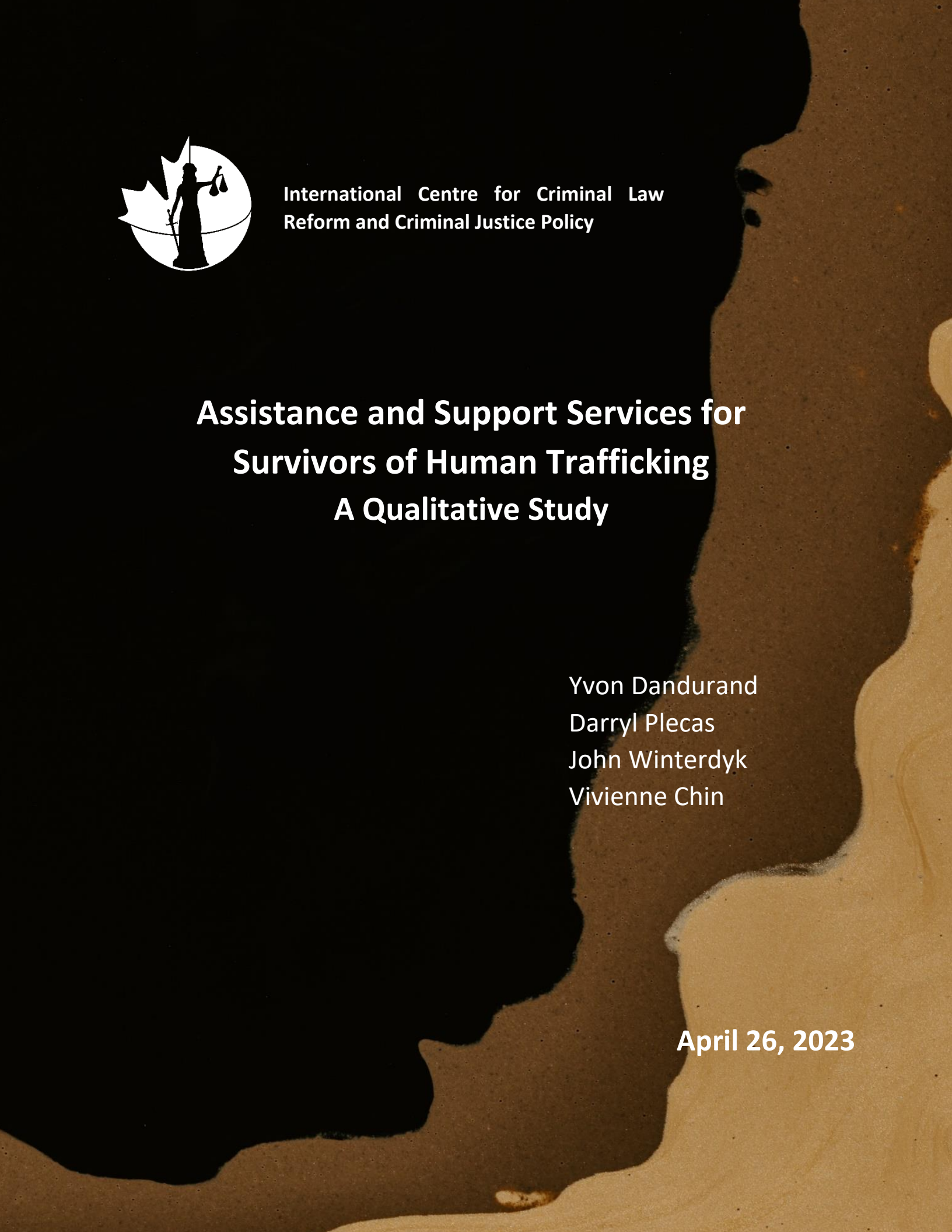

International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy

Assistance and Support Services for Survivors of Human Trafficking
A Qualitative Study

Yvon Dandurand
Darryl Plecas
John Winterdyk
Vivienne Chin

April 26, 2023

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CONTENTS

Introduction

The International Centre for Criminal Law Reform (ICCLR) conducted a qualitative survey and analysis of the types of services and supports most needed by survivors of labour and sex trafficking, including the perceived usefulness and effectiveness of these services. The study also examined service delivery models, source of referrals, models of inter-agency collaboration, and accessibility of relevant services in British Columbia and Alberta for meeting the needs of labour and sex trafficking survivors (including those at risk of or are currently being trafficked).[1]

Previous research has revealed a lot about the needs of victims and survivors of human trafficking and their difficulty in accessing relevant services.[2] Their needs are multiple and complex, but, by now, they are well known. These needs include health care (including mental health and in some cases addiction treatment), legal, financial (immediate and longer-term), protection (e.g., safe houses), housing, emotional and psychological support, connection with the justice system, and in the case of survivors of transnational trafficking, translation, assistance with respect to their immigration status, communication with home and repatriation, travel assistance, etc. The needs of trafficked survivors are not uniform and are contextualized by the purpose for which they are trafficked, particularly such as those for sexual exploitation or labour exploitation. The needs are also different for Canadian and foreign victims. There are also gender-based differences in the needs of survivors. Finally, survivors of human trafficking require during the criminal justice process when they are involved as witnesses for law enforcement and the prosecution.

However, much less in known about the services provided, the difficulties encountered in delivering them and the victims' experience of accessing and receiving them. It is often suggested that the services available to human trafficking survivors are insufficient or that they are not adapted to the needs and specific situations of survivors

[1] For the sake of brevity, this report uses the expressions "sex trafficking" and "labour trafficking" as short forms respectively for "trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation" and "trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation" a distinction commonly used since the adoption of the Palermo Protocol.

[2] We will be using the terms victims and survivors almost interchangeably to designate individuals who are or have been exploited as a result of coercion or deceit. We acknowledge that many people are victims of various forms of sexual or labour exploitation without being victims of human trafficking.

of human trafficking. Access to services varies considerably across a province and is particularly challenging for survivors who live in remote areas. More importantly, accessing services is always a challenge for human trafficking survivors, as they are often not free to identify themselves and access services; they have sometimes been forced to engage in criminal activities and fear the authorities; they fear reprisals (in Canada or in their home country); and they sometimes fear deportation or losing the ability to work in Canada. Furthermore, very limited assistance is available to individuals at immediate risk of victimization by human traffickers.

The study had the following components:

- A review of the published and grey literature on the needs of survivors of human trafficking and on programs and initiatives designed to respond to those needs and empower the survivors.
- Consultations with service providers on best practices, innovation, and client outcomes of different service delivery models, including issues relating to client referrals, client attrition, therapeutic approaches, types of support and assistance provided, recovery and social reintegration support, use of trauma-informed approaches, and approaches to interagency collaboration.
- Consultations online and in person with service providers, in British Columbia, and with survivors of human trafficking, in British Columbia and Alberta, about survivors' needs and experiences, service delivery models, best practices, and models of interagency collaboration (including law enforcement agencies).

Method

Lists of existing service providers were developed in both Alberta and British Columbia, using the ICCLR's list of service providers based on previous research and consultations; a list of agencies which participated in a recent national consultation on the implementation of the United Nations' Protocol against Trafficking in Persons; DOJ Canada's inventory of resources for victims of human trafficking (hotline); a Public Safety Canada Anti-Human Trafficking Stakeholder List; a list of low barrier resources for undocumented migrants; additional contact information for other service providers identified during initial consultations and existing network of contacts in Alberta, as well as an open-source Internet search. In total 80 service providers were identified in BC and 54 in Alberta. Not every one of these organizations was providing dedicated services to survivors of human trafficking; some were only occasionally delivering services to survivors as part of a broader service delivery mandate. Some of the organizations listed were advocating on behalf of victims of human trafficking but were not providing any direct services to survivors.

A survey titled *Assistance and Support Services for Survivors of Human Trafficking* was distributed by e-mail to all the organizations previously identified. The survey, which consisted of 23 questions, queried each organization about: the organization itself and its sources of funding; the type of services it offers; its location and the geographical area it covers; the client groups it is targeting and any specific eligibility criteria that might affect access to services; the approximate number of human trafficking survivors it assists in a year; general demographic information about these survivors who accessed its services; the extent to which the services provided appear to meet the expressed needs of human trafficking survivors; barriers which could prevent survivors from accessing the assistance they need; and, the most significant challenges encountered in terms of providing services to survivors of human trafficking (See Appendix A).

In British Columbia, the survey was intended as both a triage exercise and an opportunity to prepare for qualitative interviews with representatives of organizations actively supporting survivors of human trafficking. In Alberta, the consultation with these service providers was limited to the survey itself and did not include qualitative interviews.

The survey was sent by e-mail in May/June 2022. Then after a short period, we followed up with phones calls and e-mail messages to ensure they had received the survey and to encourage them to complete the survey as soon as possible. In BC 24 organizations responded to the survey or later provided the required information, including a law enforcement agency. In Alberta, 20 organizations responded to the survey, three of them law enforcement agencies.

In BC, the survey was followed by qualitative interviews conducted online or by phone. The main themes covered by the interviews were: the organization itself and its mandate, mission and activities in support of survivors of human trafficking; the survivors' needs and the kind of support and assistance they typically require; the kind of assistance currently offered to these survivors; perceived gaps in available support and services; interagency cooperation to provide the necessary assistance and support; and, suggestions for improvements in the delivery of the assistance and support needed by survivors of human trafficking (See Appendix B).

Between June and November 2022, 18 qualitative interviews were conducted with representatives of service providers in BC. In some instances, the initial interviews were followed by further correspondence about specific questions. Four organizations declined to participate in the interviews. A few service providers expressed their reluctance to participate in the study. One of them explained that the organization did not want to contribute to legitimizing the government's position or its inaction: "They

will name us, say that we were consulted, and decide to do whatever they want. If they want to consult us, they should approach us directly and pay us for our time."

The study also included 24 interviews with survivors of human trafficking. This was judged essential (see for example Freidman, 2022) in order to understand the survivors' needs for support, how they sought assistance, and the kind of support they received. Interviews were conducted with survivors to learn about: (1) how to support and help survivors of human trafficking; (2) what needs to be done to improve existing services for survivors of human trafficking; and (3) the actual experience of survivors who are seeking assistance and support.

Identifying potential participants in the interviews, even with the support of some service providers, proved to be quite difficult and time consuming. Since, most service providers focus primarily on victims of sex trafficking, the likelihood of interviewing survivors of labour trafficking was minimal, at best. Identifying and reaching out to survivors of labour trafficking proved especially difficult. It seemed that most of these survivors were foreign nationals, and many of them had already left Canada or moved elsewhere in search of employment; others did not speak English or French, and some were concerned about potentially jeopardizing their immigration status/situation.

For the convenience of participants, the interviews were conducted by phone, online or in person. The semi-structured interviews focused on the following areas: the participant's victimization experience; the assistance they required, the assistance and support they received, the obstacles they encountered, and their suggestions about how existing services could be improved (See Appendix C). The participants were referred to us by some of the service providers. The were given a small stipend in the form of a $50 Amazon gift card in appreciation for their time and insight. Once contacted, all the participants were offered the opportunity to see the interview questions before the interview. Once the participant agreed to be interviewed, a mutually agreeable time and day were identified. The participants' informed consent was confirmed at the beginning of the interview. On average, the interviews lasted just over one hour but sometimes went on for longer with the consent and sometimes even at the request of the interviewee.

Given the complexity that still exists with respect to the definition of human trafficking and the understandable unwillingness of some interviewees to discuss the details of their human trafficking experience, it became clear that some of the individuals we interviewed had been victim of sexual exploitation and violence (sexual assault, intimate partner violence), but not necessarily of human trafficking. Since these

individuals and human trafficking victims tended to have similar needs and were essentially accessing some of the same services, we valued their experience and their opinions about existing services and included them in our analysis.

In BC, 13 survivors were interviewed, including 3 survivors of labour trafficking (one female, 2 males), 9 survivors of sex trafficking or other forms of sexual exploitation (7 women, 1 man, 1 transsexual), and one female survivor of both sex and labour trafficking. The survivors of labour trafficking were foreign workers who had entered Canada legally, as part of an existing federal program but soon found themselves in a labour trafficking situation. Two of them have since returned to their country, one is currently applying for permanent resident status. All but three survivors of sex trafficking or sexual exploitation were Canadian citizens, two of whom had obtained support in Ontario and had been helped to leave their province to come to BC to escape their tormentors/exploiters and seek assistance. Three of the sex trafficking survivors had moved frequently, sometimes in and out of BC, because the human traffickers had sold them. One of these survivors had narrowly escaped an attempt against her life as she tried to free herself. One participant was a survivor of sexual exploitation, due to her participation in the sex economy and eventual struggle with addiction but was not a victim of human trafficking. One human trafficking survivor was a South Asian international student who had been a victim of both labour and sexual exploitation.

In Alberta, a total of 11 interviews were conducted with survivors. Only one of them involved a survivor of labour trafficking. It was difficult to ascertain how many of the other ten survivors were victims of sex trafficking as opposed to other forms of sexual exploitation or violence. Ten of the eleven participants identified as female and were between 36 and 58 years of age. Only one of the participants was a male (aged 49). Most participants identified as being full-time residents of Alberta (n=9), Ontario (n=1), and British Columbia (n=1). Four participants listed more than one province as their residence (AB/ON: n = 3; AB/BC: n = 1). Ten participants identified as Canadian citizens and one participant identified as a dual American/Canadian citizen.[3]

Service Providers Who Participated in the Study

Of the 23 organizations that participated in the study in British Columbia, 20 reported that they offered direct services to human trafficking survivors. The latter only offer services in that province, although two of them had sister organizations in other provinces that offered similar services, and one offered assistance to migrants across Canada. Three organizations do not provide direct services to survivors of human

[3] See a separate report on the findings of the Alberta surveys: Winterdyk J. & Hincks, C. (2023). *Support and Assistance to Survivors of Human Trafficking in Alberta*. Vancouver : ICCLR. https://icclr.org/publications/support-and-assistance-to-survivors-of-human-trafficking-in-alberta/

trafficking but are actively involved in advocacy, awareness raising, or training. Six organizations have a capacity to offer comprehensive programs to support and assist survivors of sex trafficking, although their broader mandate was to support women victims of abuse or violence, or women engaged in the sex economy. Seven organizations offer various services to the community and can offer some assistance and support to victims of crime in general, including human trafficking victims. Two programs specialize in assisting child victims of sexual exploitation or at risk of being exploited. Two organizations focus on helping immigrants and foreign workers, including survivors of labour trafficking or forced labour. Most service providers offer services within a limited geographical area, most often an urban area, revealing a lack of available services in other areas, especially remote areas. The primary source of funding for most of the organizations surveyed were the federal and provincial governments or private donations. The funding was often project-based and for a limited period. At least three of the existing dedicated programs had not yet been able to secure funding for their program beyond the end March 2023.

In Alberta, 13 organizations indicated that they primarily provide service to victims and survivors of human trafficking or sexual exploitation. Six organizations provide broad-based comprehensive community services, and five organizations reported that they provide broad-based comprehensive victim services. The most common forms of direct support provided were safety planning, psycho-social treatment and counselling, victim support during the investigation or court processes, facilitating communication with relatives, and lodging (including emergency shelter). Many organizations provide a blend of direct and indirect service support, providing referrals to translation services, emergency financial support, legal assistance and representation, immigration services, and medical care. Seven organizations rely on government and private dollars and five reported that they are funded solely through government agreements and grants. Only five agencies reported being funded solely through private donations.

In both provinces, the services these organizations offer to human trafficking victims cover a broad range of support and assistance, including: lodging and emergency shelter, safety planning, physical protection and access to safe shelter, emergency financial assistance, translation services, physical protection, psycho-social support or counselling, access to medical and mental health care, addiction treatment and recovery, legal information and legal assistance and representation, assistance with regularizing the individual's immigration status, employment assistance, access to government services, access to compensation/restitution (e.g., unpaid wages), and assistance with relocation, repatriation, transportation. Some of the organizations have a case management or intensive case management capacity that allows case workers to support survivors over a long period of transition and healing. Others can only offer a specific service, e.g., legal assistance. Some offer services mainly through referrals.

This patchwork of services mostly relied on referrals and interagency collaboration and, as a result, typically present survivors with various access to services challenges.

Limitations of the Study

Even though concerted efforts were made to include urban and rural representation from the service providers, the sample size for rural service providers was small and no distinction was made to acknowledge any differences in the services between the two settings. Also, even though survivors of sexual exploitation and forced labour were interviewed in both provinces, the small sample of respondents did not allow a consideration of the diversity of this population (e.g., age, gender, lifestyle, domestic vs. international trafficking, etc.).

Another potential limitation of the projects is that the sample of survivors and service providers is perhaps skewed in a nuanced way, impacting the findings even though they are largely consistent with the extant literature.

Finally, although trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced labour are widely recognized as common forms of trafficking, despite their nuanced differences, other than to identify different service needs for either form of trafficking, due to the small sample of service providers who work with forced labour, the richness of the findings may not have been as robust or informed as they could have been. Nevertheless, the fact that this project echoes many of the findings from similar studies suggests the findings are robust but that there are opportunities for further inquiry and investigation.

Victims' Needs

The Justice Education society recently conducted a survey of BC service providers on the observed needs of victims and survivors of human trafficking. The survey's findings have not been released yet, but preliminary findings about victims' needs identified the following priority areas: safety and protection measures; access to financial services; legal assistance and legal information; crisis intervention; mental health and recovery support; helping victims make police reports; de-stigmatizing sex work and helping survivors build back pride, a positive identity, and a sense of belonging. The list covers the priorities identified during our interviews with survivors in BC and Alberta.

The BC service providers interviewed often emphasized the need for front-line workers to understand the specific needs and circumstances of sex trafficking victims. One of them stated: "We must all keep in mind that there is no such thing as a generic victim. People who try to help survivors must understand the issue and have the necessary

skills. This is not always present within the organizations that help survivors. There needs to be an expertise in sexualized violence and human trafficking."

In Alberta, eight of the eleven survivors who participated in the interviews talked about the lack of trauma-informed and human trafficking-specific services available to victims. They discussed how most agencies they went to did not appear to understand how to identify, engage, and support a victim of sexual exploitation and trafficking. One survivor stated, "There is no 'one method' of assistance or support because all individuals are different and need different things. But [there] must be common sense rules and very personalized (response) to each individual's needs." As a result, the connections these survivors made with resources were limited and most stopped attending appointments or programs with the agencies.

Service providers described the assistance needs of survivors as more extreme and enduring than those of other types of victims served, in particular, the survivors' needs for long-term housing, health and mental health, substance use treatment, legal aid, and employment assistance. Several studies have also documented the human trafficking victims' complex support needs in the initial and long-term aftermath, including mental health services and job and life skills training to help them fully recover (for example, Rajaram & Tidball, 2018).

A common observation among service providers was that the needs of human trafficking victims change over time, with basic survival needs coming first, followed later by needs in mental health, housing, education, job training, and employment. In the immediate period after escaping an exploitative situation, most victims require basic survival needs, safety, health care, and emergency accommodation, and in some cases addiction treatment and recovery support. Once these primary needs are addressed, the victims' focus shifts to recovering from the abusive experience and making plans for their future, addressing outstanding legal issues including immigration issues, seeking transitional or permanent housing, obtaining education or job training and work permits, and in some cases returning home.

The general needs of adult victims of sex trafficking apparently do not vary much concerning their trafficking experience, country of origin, or mode of access to the services. Furthermore, service providers confirmed that the needs of sex trafficking victims, apart from the need for protection, are generally similar to those of other individuals engaged in the sex economy. Services developed for the first group of clients can also meet the needs of the other. However, the situation of children and youth victims can be significantly different than that of adult victims and given their age and level of development and their vulnerability and dependence on adults, their needs can also differ significantly from those of adult victims.

Challenges in dealing with family law and child protection issues were sometimes mentioned by survivors. Some of them mentioned the problems they faced in maintaining or recovering access to or custody of their children. They feared that child protection authorities may apprehend their children if it became known that they had been involved in the sex industry, were struggling with addiction, or had lost their job and lacked the resources to support themselves and their children. According to one service provider: "Clients are often intimidated by service providers, which is in part related to their lack of self-esteem and confidence. Many who have children are also afraid of what MCFD will do."

Some survivors needed help dealing with various family law issues, especially child access, custody, and protection issues. For a foreign victim facing possible deportation, there was the added fear of possibly being separated from their child.

Basic Needs

The most pressing needs of human trafficking victims are often fundamental as they seek practical assistance concerning their basic safety, housing, food, clothing, communication and transportation, clothing, and food, as well as communication, and financial assistance. Some sex trafficking survivors apparently felt they needed to maintain their link with the sex economy to meet their survival needs.

Protection

Personal safety was a priority for most of the survivors we interviewed and especially so for victims of sex trafficking and youth victims. In Alberta, survivors noted that in addition to prosecuting exploiters, offering adequate protection must be a priority if victims are to come forward. This means increasing the availability and accessibility of safe houses. One participant spoke at length about the need for safe houses or secure shelters to house and protect victims of human trafficking for a minimum of six months in order to help them feel safe, build trust, and begin to benefit from services. She pointed out that ideally victims would be "removed from the province and given a new life and new identification, not just 30 days in a safe house and then back to their life. Consistency must be paramount. Most programs are eight weeks long, and then it's on to the next program. Eight weeks is not enough time because the women's trauma is severe. More time is needed to build trust that is needed."

Housing Needs

Survivors spoke about the need for both emergency and long-term housing for survivors; safe houses and safe housing, in general, were identified as a priority. In both BC and Alberta, several survivors spoke about the lack of housing options they faced when attempting to exit. In Alberta, survivors who were interviewed commented

on the lack of safety and long-term support available through existing housing programs. For example, several of them talked about how "dirty" and "gross" the shelters are, many with bed bugs, dirty water, dirty bedding, etc. As a result, most of them felt unsafe or uncomfortable going to a shelter. Another issue frequently mentioned regarding housing was the lack of long-term or transitional support. One participant pointed out that most shelters will only allow someone to stay for a maximum of 24 days and that this is not enough for the individual to get themselves organized when they are traumatized, mentally ill, addicted to substances, without identification, and financial supports. Another participant stated that a sizable number of those involved in exploitation and substance use are in and out of shelters, so the environment is not conducive to escaping a negative situation. She pointed out that "victims and survivors cannot stay where they are exploited and be expected to heal there. It is NOT possible."

Access to safe living situations and supportive connections are especially important among young people engaged in the sex economy (see also, Gibbs et al., 2015). One service provider in Northern BC explained that "existing safe houses are not safe enough in many instances, especially when you have a gang looking for a girl. In some situations, we have driven to and rescued women, but there was no place to put them. We pay the bill to put them in safe housing, for example, in a bed and breakfast".

Health-Care Needs

Survivors often have pressing healthcare needs when they first reach out for assistance. Access to these services is sometimes problematic. Some service providers explained that the response of health care professionals is not always stigma or trauma informed. Many of these professionals do not really understand the challenges faced by human trafficking victims, and this can affect the quality of the treatment survivors receive. In previous research, Noble and colleagues reported that "(it) is important that health organizations such as walk-in clinics and hospitals work towards eliminating stigma related to the sex industry, substance use, and human trafficking" (Noble et al., 2020: 29).

Mental Health Care

Multiple mental health disorders may arise as a result of human trafficking, the most common being depression, PTSD (Chu, K. & Billings, 2020; Chambers et al., 2022) and drug addiction. Addiction treatment services for many of the sex trafficking survivors is a necessity. Survivors frequently use substances either to cope with their trauma or other mental health issues. Traffickers use the victims' addiction as a means of control or as a pretext to encourage survivors to "go out and make money" (Noble et al, 2020: 40). Access to addiction services is often an issue in both Alberta and BC,

especially outside of the main urban areas, including the lack of facilities and the long waiting lists.

It is often suggested that psychotherapy can help the survivor reduce symptoms, overcome shame, and relearn to trust others (Contreras, 2017). Access to trauma counselling, in particular, is also often suggested as a priority need of sex trafficking survivors, although the latter rarely defined that as an urgent need for them (Dandurand and Chin, 2022). Survivors and service providers have explained that survivors are rarely ready to engage in trauma counselling until much later in their personal journey of recovery. However, it is clear that for many human trafficking victims, additional support interventions are needed to facilitate adaptive change (see: Countryman-Roswurm & DiLollo, 2017).

A similar review of existing services for victims of human trafficking in Ontario (De Shalit et al., 2021) noted that service providers in that province commonly referred to trauma, mental health and drug or alcohol use as areas of focus in their anti-trafficking programs.

> "More specifically, in interviews and on their websites, organizations described their programming as supportive of people who have experienced physical and sexual assault, or emotional and mental abuse, as well as those who have difficulty managing emotions, problems forming healthy relationships, low self-esteem, parenting challenges and drug or alcohol dependencies" (De Shalit et al., 2021: 1721).

Some of the service providers we interviewed also talked about the danger of pathologizing human trafficking. Such pathologizing can disenfranchise victims and is sometimes unresponsive to the needs they have expressed.

Financial Security

Human trafficking survivors commonly identify financial security as a key priority. The survivors we interviewed mostly referred to their need for immediate financial assistance and help in accessing governmental assistance programs. One can safely assume that economic empowerment, in addition to basic needs for self and family, involves several key dimensions, such as safe employment with benefits, holistic education, financial management, goal achievement, or financial independence (see: Cordisco Tsai, 2022).

Demand for Services

Most service providers in BC and Alberta expressed the view that the demand for services for human trafficking victims exceeds the currently available services. A few of them referred to "waiting lists", especially for shelter and addiction treatment.

However, the lists of clients they were referring to were not limited to survivors of human trafficking and usually included other victims of violence or sexual exploitation. Moreover, the lists in question typically referred to a demand for specific services such as housing and shelter, addiction and recovery services, physical and mental health care, and legal assistance. The demand for these services is not driven by the needs of human trafficking victims. It appeared that survivors who need immediate support and emergency assistance are usually able to connect with or be referred to a service provider. This is particularly true of child victims of trafficking.

In Alberta and BC, very few organizations surveyed or consulted had precise data on the number of new human trafficking victims they assist each year. This was partly due to their difficulty in identifying who among their clients had been a victim of human trafficking as opposed to other forms of exploitation or abuse. It seemed that the number of victims of human trafficking was relatively small, especially for service providers who do not offer specific human trafficking victim services. Most of the service providers consulted could not provide data on the number and characteristics of human trafficking victims they assist every year. Rough estimates varied from 5 to "perhaps 50" per year, but most agencies did not keep separate data for human trafficking victims as opposed to other victims of violence, sexual assault, or other forms of abuse. At this point, it still seems impossible to estimate the number of distinct human trafficking survivors accessing specialized assistance and support services in either province.

Some of the service providers have active outreach programs locally, especially for youth. However, most of them rely on self-referrals, referrals from families (especially when children and youth are involved), and referrals from other agencies or from the police to connect with human trafficking survivors in need of assistance. A few agencies conduct visits on worksites and farms and try to work with employers and businesses to reach out to victims of labour trafficking. Some agencies have websites that provide information and offer services directed at human trafficking survivors.

In both provinces, most organizations offering specialized services to survivors of sex trafficking only offering services to women and girls. The few organizations offering support to victims of labour trafficking offer services to victims regardless of gender. The same applies to agencies supporting child victims of sex trafficking as they deliver services to both girls and boys.

Research suggests that sex trafficking survivors who identify as LGBTQ2S+ are frequently under-identified and under-served by law enforcement, child protection agencies, health service providers, and community-based anti-trafficking service providers (see, for example, Martinez & Kelle, 2013). In Alberta, nine service

providers provided statistics on the number of LGBTQ2S+ clients they serve. Except for one agency which indicated 17% of its total caseload identify as LGBTQ2S+, the remaining service providers all indicated that less than 10% of their total clients identify as LGBTQ2S+. In British Columbia, only four service providers had information about the number of LGBTQ2S+ clients they serve. One agency which provides services to sexual assault victims and occasionally also to sex trafficking victims reported that about 5% of its clients were in that category. Three agencies specializing in child protection and services to child victims of sexual exploitation reported respectively that approximately 10%, 15%, and 27% of their clients fell in that category.

Most service providers could not give a reliable estimate of the percentage of their clients who identified as Indigenous. The records of two programs in the BC Lower Mainland region which had recently been evaluated showed that respectively 31% and 24% of their clients identified as Indigenous (Dandurand & Chin, 2023). No one disputed the need for Indigenous-led responses to trafficking and programs for Indigenous women victims of trafficking. Such services are needed to provide a safe space and holistic services that create a path for healing for Indigenous women and girls who have experienced trafficking (See: Olson-Pitawanakwat & Baskin, 2021).

Availability of Services

Due to a lack of publicly available program evaluations, little is known about the extent to which existing victim support programs are able to meet the needs of human-trafficking victims. A service provider shared the following observation with us:

> "Of specific concern is the fact that most agencies that provide needed services are under-resourced, under-staffed, and not always accessible because they are not open evenings and weekends. All this amounts to a huge barrier to victims accessing services in a timely way."

In some remote areas, where specialized services are rare, victims of human trafficking must rely on other services such as the services of general victim services, sexual assault centres, child protection agencies, etc. These agencies do not always have the funding to travel to remote areas where services are required.

In BC, there are also general services for crime victims which victims of human trafficking can access. For example, VictimLinkBC is a toll-free, confidential, multilingual service available 27/7 across B.C. and the Yukon. The service provides information and referral services to all victims of crime and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence, including victims of labour or sex trafficking. It also provides information on the justice system, relevant federal and provincial legislation and programs, crime prevention, safety planning, protection order registry

and other resources as needed. The extent to which victims of human trafficking access these services is unknown.

Outside of the main urban centres, there is not always a recognition of the scope of human trafficking and what it looks like in the area. Specialized services are generally unavailable in BC more remote areas. In the words of some of the service providers we interviewed:

> "The issue has not received any public attention in our area (Northern BC)".
>
> "In the case of emergent and urgent needs, there is very little access to immediate urgent services. In some cases, the individual must be referred to an agency in the Lower Mainland. Finding suitable accommodation is often very difficult for survivors. Sometimes we work with an agency in the Lower Mainland but are not always able to help."
>
> "Access to addiction services for women is terrible in this area".
>
> "In fact, there is no women addiction treatment centre in PG (Prince George). There is a faith-based program, but it is not suitable for our clients."

In Alberta, when asked what people needed to consider as they tried to help human trafficking victims, some survivors commented on the need for family members, police, and other professionals to listen to victims when they finally talk about what has happened to them. One survivor said: "People need to really listen. They need to make the victim feel safe and protected because fear makes it impossible (…) fear makes people feel uncared for." Another one echoed that comment and stated: "They (victims) are not a number, they are humans. People need to know it's ok and safe to report. Parents need to hear and believe. Police need to initially believe a situation." Another survivor noted: "[People] don't have to be brilliant or an expert but must listen, care, and believe. Be supportive." Finally, another survivor said "People need to know it (human trafficking) is not a big scary word, and that it happens elsewhere (…) it doesn't just happen to weak-minded people. All people have vulnerabilities (…)."

Support for Victims of Sex Trafficking

Although most victims of sex trafficking reported difficulties in accessing the services they needed, many sex trafficking victims reported that they were very satisfied with the assistance they had received. Satisfaction with the services received seemed to be related to having been able to connect with a support worker or case manager who was able to help the victim navigate through the services available, make useful and sometimes "warm" referrals to needed services, and empower the victim to achieve her goals. Some of these victims were still involved in the sex economy, mostly for survival purposes or to support an addiction. They thought that it was important that the service

providers did not make their assistance conditional on the victims leaving the sex economy and understood that they sometimes needed time to transition into a different kind of situation.

In BC, all the sex trafficking victims interviewed reported that they had eventually been able to obtain the support they needed. In fact, two of the sex trafficking victims summarized the help they had received as follows: "They saved my life. I would not be here today without their help", or "I don't know how I would have made it through the year without that support". Another victim explained: "They understand my issues. They may not have dealt with someone like me before. I was in danger. I have a lot of problems, including mental health. Getting mental health support was a problem, including not getting medication and a diagnosis. They helped me better understand my mental health challenges". Indeed, many of the victims and service providers interviewed agreed on the importance of understanding the mental health aspect of recovery, including the psychological processes that are in the healing process.

When asked about the most important support they had received, sex trafficking victims referred to: emergency shelter and housing assistance; practical assistance (food, referrals to services, financial assistance), and safety planning. Access to drug treatment and recovery support services was also mentioned. Those who had access to a case manager or dedicated support worker mentioned how crucially important it had been for them to have someone to support them on an ongoing and non-judgmental basis, someone "in their corner" who is there "no matter what". In some organizations, the victims were able to connect with a case worker (or service navigator) who was able to help them identify and access various other services, including housing or employment assistance, medical care, mental health care, income assistance, and occasionally, legal information and assistance.

In a recently reviewed program for sex trafficking victims and women in the sex economy in BC, women who had completed the program indicated that they were very appreciative of the assistance they had received, sometimes commenting that the assistance had been crucial to them with respect to securing housing, accessing mental health and addiction treatment, and dealing with legal issues (Dandurand & Chin, 2022).

In Alberta, the four sex trafficking victims who reported receiving valuable support were assisted through the Action Coalition on Human Trafficking Alberta (ACT), the Salvation Army, and the women's shelter. These participants stated that they were able to successfully engage with these services because they felt listened to, believed, and given time to heal at their own pace. They also reported that these services provided hands-on navigation of the various systems and service providers to get what they

needed instead of offering a pamphlet and telling the individual to contact the agency independently. In large part, this made the survivors feel supported and helped them connect to the services they required to escape human trafficking. Several agencies were identified as having helped meet the survivors needs. One interviewee commented "they were amazing (…) they were the first to support, hear and believe me." Another noted that a certain service agency worker "validated me". But one of these participants noted that "no one saw my situation as having been trafficked."

In BC service providers, with few exceptions, noted that a true continuum of care is not yet available in that province to victims of sex trafficking. Thinking in terms of a service continuum based on the victims' needs, from outreach, crisis intervention and acute care, to transition care and long-term care, they suggested that, collectively, the sector has not yet achieved the goal of providing a continuum of care for sex trafficking victims who need it.

One BC organization focuses on helping immigrant women engaged in indoor sex work, promoting the rights, health, and safety of immigrant women engaged in indoor sex work through front-line service and systemic advocacy. Its staff provide virtual outreach to im/migrant sex workers via text message, email, telephone, apps and other internet and communication technologies. The services include a Community Peer Program which provides opportunities for social connection and learning.

Different Approaches Human Trafficking

Both service providers and survivors frequently spoke about the need for support and services that are specifically designed for survivors of sex trafficking. This includes having staff that are trained and knowledgeable about the experience of sex trafficking, the process of recovery, and survivors' multi-faceted needs. On the most frustrating challenges reported by the service providers we consulted was the lack of knowledge and understanding regarding human trafficking among other service providers and law enforcement.

One service provider remarked that counter-exploitation work in the region was mostly faith-based and in opposition to prostitution: "We realize that this is not helping anyone. We need to acknowledge that from a client-centred and harm-reduction perspective". One agency had a problem "with stigmatizing women involved in the sex economy as victims of human trafficking". Another noted how ideological differences led to barriers to access to services. For instance, making it a condition to leave the sex industry for an individual to access a service is an unrealistic approach to protecting and providing assistance to victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. One service provider explained: "One of the first policy changes for our organization had

to do was trying to remove any possible barrier from access to help because of involvement in the sex industry."

Several respondents reported their difficulties with the (prostitution) abolitionist movement. One of them said: "I have not seen the abolitionist stance being supportive. It has been an obstacle. We must act from a risk reduction perspective and move away from the moralistic approach."

Several service providers told us that they did not see a difference between sexual exploitation, prostitution, and sex trafficking. They used human trafficking synonymously with sexual exploitation: "It's all the same client population, we don't need to talk about human trafficking".

De Shalit and colleagues (2021) observed a similar attitude among many service providers in Ontario:

> "In addition, many interviewees identified various sex work-related activities and relationships as inherently exploitative and therefore as further 'symptoms' of trafficking. Vocabulary was an important framing tool in this regard. Managers, bosses and operators of sex industry establishments, for example, were frequently described by participants as 'pimps', and were depicted as yet another sign of trafficking. In making this rhetorical leap, and by defining all or most sex workers who work for third parties as trafficked, organisations were able to apply for and receive anti-trafficking funding to support their existing programming" (De Shalit et al., 2021: 1723).

At least one service provider in BC insisted that this is not a simple matter of a disagreement around a definition. One of their publications explains:

> Any interchangeable use of the terms prostitution, sex work, sex slavery, sex trafficking and human trafficking is irresponsible, misleading and deeply harmful. (…) It is not just words. We draw meaning and actions from those words. Refusing to acknowledge the difference between sex work and trafficking is a deliberate manipulation, which is designed to support arguments for the elimination the sex industry entirely. This is a very different goal to addressing human trafficking, since sex work and human trafficking are not the same thing" (Swan Vancouver, 2020a: 14; see also Swan Vancouver, 2020b).

In a broader context, during a leadership gathering on complex service delivery in BC, participants suggested that "problems in service delivery coordination can sometimes relate to real philosophical differences in approach" (Connective, 2022: 3).

Comprehensive Case Management

Many of the service providers consulted suggested that, in most instances, sex trafficking survivors needed the comprehensive assistance that only a well-designed case management service can offer. A few of the service providers were able to offer that kind of service to survivors of human trafficking. In every instance that was mentioned to us, the service in question was not offered exclusively to sex trafficking victims and targeted a larger group of potential clients involved in the sex economy.

Best practices for supporting survivors include stigma-informed and trauma-informed approaches which; (1) prioritize physical and emotional safety, (2) provide assistance with basic survival needs, (3) address co-occurring issues such as addiction and mental illness, (4) use an empowerment-based approach and encourage survivors to make decisions and have control over the services they receive, and (5) help the individual build on their strengths and develop resilience (Macy & Johns, 2011; Muraya & Fry, 2015; Davy, 2015; Steiner et al., 2018; Dandurand & Chin, 2023). Research and program evaluations have confirmed a need for a more holistic treatment approach, particularly emphasizing comprehensive case management that is survivor-focused and trauma-informed (Macy & Johns, 2011; Konstantopoulos et al., 2013; Gibbs et al., 2015; Davy, 2015; Edwards et al., 2021; Dandurand & Chin, 2022, 2023). Program evaluations have also shown that effective program delivery for survivors depends on the appointment of a single point of contact person to support the delivery of various forms of assistance, either within a single organization or as part of a network of service providers (Davy, 2015; Dandurand & Chin, 2023). This appears to be especially true for youth victims.

Case management may include any or all of the following interventions:

- Conducting intake and assessments, providing crisis intervention when needed.
- Assisting the individual in addressing their immediate needs and accessing medical care as required.
- Helping the individual establish a safety plan, informing the individual about their rights.
- Explaining available social service benefits and how to access them.
- Helping the individual establish goals.
- Providing emotional support.
- Advocating for the individual with other service providers and law enforcement.
- Making referrals and appointments on behalf of clients including referrals to mental health and addiction services.
- Assisting with transportation needs.

- Coordinating services and following up on services provided by other organizations.

The case management service may vary in intensity. On a pilot project basis, two service providers in the BC Lower Mainland area offered, until recently, intensive case management for women involved in the sex economy including victims of sex trafficking.

Network of Service Providers

No matter the case management model adopted by the service providers, none of them alone can support the complex needs of sex trafficking victims. Services providers must work together, preferably as a network or coalition of service providers (Davy, 2015). The client referrals among these services need to be effective and responsive to the victims' needs and situations. Although several of the service providers we consulted referred to the presence of an informal network among some local agencies, including in some cases some formal collaboration protocols, they also admitted that these coalitions were not particularly effective at providing seamless support and assistance to sex trafficking victims.

The victims we interviewed in BC sometimes reported their exasperation with interagency referrals, the waiting lists, the different eligibility criteria for various services, the need to go through a lengthy intake process each time they tried, and the absence of follow-up. Those who benefit from a dedicated case manager (or single point of contact) reported having had a much more positive experience of inter-agency referrals. Several service providers acknowledged these challenges, and one of them stated: "Stop the wheel of referrals where they (the clients) get no access to service. We need to do better." Some service providers deplored the lack of effective interagency collaboration. For example, one of them said: "Working closely with other agencies to ensure that clients' needs are addressed is very hard. The services they advertise are not necessarily the services they are able to offer." Another one explained: "Many of our clients simply cannot follow up on a referral to a new service. It is a big challenge for many of them. It isn't very safe. Or they do not have the means to do so. They get tired of being told 'no', 'sorry', or 'come back'".

Outreach and Barriers to Access to Services

In Alberta, the organizations surveyed indicated that the majority of their clients had connected with their service through a professional agency or government system (e.g., justice, health, child protection, and education) referral or through self-referral by the victim. The next most prevalent forms of connection were made through friends and/or family members and police incidents or investigations.

One Vancouver area organization manages a hotline for women victims of violence needing assistance. Until recently the hotline had been available 24 hours a day and could refer women to a case worker or other assistance. The hotline also serves as an important resource for women engaged in the sex trade, including women victims of human trafficking. Until recently the same organization also offered the dedicated services of a case manager working with women engaged or recently engaged in the sex economy and to whom these calls could be referred. Other organizations have drop-in facilities for women where victims of human trafficking could go and perhaps be provided access or a referral to other services. These drop-in centers do not offer specialized services to victims of human trafficking and their staff have varying degree of human trafficking awareness and specialized training.

Survivors of human trafficking often blame themselves for having failed to recognize the deceptive or threatening recruitment tactics used by traffickers, or for not having escaped the exploitative situation in which they find themselves. These feelings of shame, confusion and guilt may prevent them from seeking help, contribute to their low self-esteem, and make them wary of trusting others.

Service providers talked to us about meeting the victims where they are at and offering access to low-barrier services. Outreach services should be low-barrier and support those who are currently in the sex industry from a harm reduction perspective. Expecting or demanding that they leave the sex industry or promise to do so before providing assistance is not only unrealistic but also disempowering the victims and discouraging themselves from making their own choice. As one service provider put it, “empowering victims and encouraging their agency should be of first goal”.

According to one service provider,

> “Victims are often not ready to engage with us or to leave their abuser. Some of them only want access to a specific type of assistance, no questions asked”. It seems that attaching any condition to the support being offered limits the effectiveness of outreach activities. Some service providers emphasize the notion of timing or of waiting for the “right moment” to engage the victim: “They need to be ready. We need to be patient”.

Another service provider remarked:

> “It is not so much that victims are reluctant to come forward, but that the underlying prejudice towards marginalized persons is such that they do not even get considered as victims when they should be. In this regard, she specifically mentioned health care workers, police officers, and the courts.”

One service provider, referring to the difficulty victims often experience in trying to break away from an exploitative situation, remarked "it takes time for some of us to understand how pernicious the control methods are". Many of the victims, it was noted, are still under the active control of their trafficker or someone else who takes advantage of their situation. Indeed, it is well known that traffickers are prone to use psychological and emotional control tactics to manipulate their victims and lock them into a state of psychological and physical dependency. These methods include intimidation and threats, lies and deception, emotional manipulation, and subjecting victims to unsafe, unpredictable, and emotionally threatening events. Some of the methods used by traffickers to keep their victims under control involve keeping them isolated or moving them frequently to prevent them from making contacts for help or developing new relationships (Dandurand, 2022). Such tactics kept victims in a state of permanent fearfulness and uncertainty about their immediate and long-term future, and therefore obligated to obey the demands of those who exploit them.

Some victims come from out of province, often as part of their plan to escape their exploiters. Two of the victims of sex trafficking we interviewed in BC had fled from their abusers in another province, one from Quebec and one from Ontario. In both cases, their traffickers were associated with a criminal gang. One of them explained that she had been sold several times. The two of them recounted how a victim assistance service in another province had contacted a service provider in BC to arrange for assistance and provided them with a small amount of money to travel. In both instances, the victims were impressed by the assistance they had received both in their province of origin and in BC as they tried to resettle. They received help in developing a personal safety plan. Both, although one of them more than the other, were trying to hide from the traffickers because they were still concerned about their safety.

Victims do not always fully realize the extent of their exploitation and many would not necessarily describe their situation as one involving human trafficking (Nobble et al., 2020). Many of them cannot yet see a pathway out of the exploitative relationships they are caught in. Some of them are paralyzed by fear. This is particularly true of youth victims. As an Ontario study reported:

> "One of the most common psychological barriers to exiting sex trafficking described by both survivors and service providers is fear. Fear was referred to in three ways: Fear of the repercussions or retaliation from traffickers, fear of the unknown, and fear of not being believed (Nobble et al., 2020: 41).

This has clear implications for service providers engaged in proactively reaching out to sex trafficking victims. The front-line workers cannot always wait until victims self-identify as exploited before establishing a relationship. Establishing a relationship of trust with the victims is an essential aspect of victim outreach activities. However, sex

trafficking survivors have typically encountered multiple forms of deceit, betrayal, discrimination, or rejection, whether from traffickers, law enforcement authorities and service providers, or even family members. It tends to be difficult for some survivors to trust others, including service providers or representatives of institutions such as health care and the police.

Some of the victims of sex trafficking interviewed in BC explained that they had been free to leave the sex trade and were no longer under anyone's control or influence, but they had hesitated for a long time before asking for help. One of them described herself as simply "aging out" of the sex trade and needing help with that transition. A few of them suffered from drug addiction and were not ready to engage in a recovery process, something which they thought was a pre-requisite to both leaving the sex industry and receiving help. At least two of them were continuing their involvement in the sex trade while seeking assistance for practical issues such as lodging and access to medical services.

Sex trafficking victims are exposed to threats and coercion by their exploiters (Doyle et al., 2019; Dandurand, 2012; 2017). This is why it is important to emphasize a victim's safety and emotional well-being when developing outreach activities and other support programs. It is also why prevention and law enforcement programs that inflate fears of deportation for irregular migrants fail to address the needs of an ever-growing illegalized population or its trafficking problem (Pashang, 2019).

Furthermore, researchers have identified the need to appreciate the dual identities of some survivors as both victims and offenders and the challenges this creates for victims, survivors and law enforcement for victim identification and outreach (Duncan & DeHart, 2019). Finally, victims who do not have legal status in Canada face tremendous barriers to accessing services, especially when they have reason to fear deportation (Nobble et al., 2020). New immigrants who are victims of labour trafficking may feel isolated, face language barriers, and be unaware of the assistance available to them.

Safety Measures, Safety Planning and Housing

Safety is often the leading and most pressing concern of sex trafficking victims. Some victims must leave the area where they live to be safe, while others rely on safety planning and the security that a service provider can sometimes offer in collaboration with the police. Service providers explained that there is often an urgent need for safety planning at the level where the client is, in a non-judgmental way, whether the victim is still in contact with the trafficker or engaged in the sex trade.

A service provider noted that "safety focus interventions are only possible when you understand the risks, but that's not always the case". Another service provider who works mostly with youth victims added:

> "Our clients are very aware of their safety. 99% of them protect that safety carefully. They are keenly aware of not disclosing information. For the first month or so, we accompany them in order to facilitate their adjustment - stabilize the situation, normalize – help them deal with various authorities/services. Their boundaries have been violated so many times that they have a hard time maintaining their own boundaries (not acquiescing to authority)."

Helping sex trafficking victims develop a realistic safety plan is seen as an important pre-requisite to providing other forms of assistance. A service provider mentioned that "victims commonly fear being found by ex-partners or pimps who trafficked them in the first place, who have threatened them, and who go to great lengths to track them, including using car tracking systems". One service provider explained:

> "Safety planning is very important. We work with police on that, when there is an organized crime element involved or when there is a specific threat. VPD works with us. Threats are sometimes related to mental health and addiction. Some of the victims were transported to Vancouver by the perpetrators. They do not know the area and do not have much contact with anyone."

Another service provider explained:

> "The clients need safety measures. We do safety plan with them, more or less on an ad hoc basis. We have a safety plan for suicidality, but nothing specific for human trafficking and exploitation. We are trying to develop a catch all safety plan that can address many different types of risk such as overdose or violence."

We were also told that high security housing is sometimes needed to protect victims, especially for individuals under organized crime threats, but is unfortunately rarely available. One service provider insisted that "(t)he most important thing that the government can do is provide more second stage housing to give victims a genuine sense of stability, safety, and security".

Client Centred and Client-led Assistance

Most of the service providers interviewed emphasized that all support interventions need not only be client-centred, but also client-driven: "It is very important to recognize that exploitation includes eliminating choices and autonomy for the youth. They also face a risk of retaliation (from their exploiter). It's their decision." Given the coercion and control involved in sex trafficking, it is imperative that all service providers offer

options for survivors rather than prescribed program components. This means that survivors identify their needs and decide the modality, nature, pace, and intensity of support they receive. This also means that survivors should be encouraged to identify and focus on their strengths and the qualities and skills they already possess. As we often heard from service providers, many victims demonstrate remarkable resilience and survival skills.

Victims of human trafficking can sometimes be ambivalent about the assistance they receive or fearful of what may be expected from them in terms of collaborating with the authorities. One of the service providers consulted shared: "We oftentimes have problems keeping in touch with some of the clients, particularly young women. We often have to chase them and send them regular messages and invitations to contact us. We send them a message once a week." Another one observed that "it is important to make it clear to them that they are always welcome, no matter what, whether they follow-up on their exit plan or not or are still in recovery or not. Sometimes they are ashamed and feel that they have let us down."

As was frequently noted by service providers, another aspect of a victim-centred approach is allowing victims to proceed with difficult transitions at their own pace. For example, many of them will need a reflection period before they are able to make important decisions about their life or what they want to do next. It is important for service providers to respect that victims' individual pace, including providing them with time to recover from trafficking physically and emotionally before deciding if they want to cooperate with law enforcement. That advice applies also to official decisions about seeking the cooperation of a victim in a prosecution or addressing their immigration status (Fernandes et al., 2021).

Trauma Informed Support

For many survivors of human trafficking, that experience has been very traumatic. Traumatic experiences suffered by survivors of sex trafficking are often complex, multiple and may have occurred over a long period of time. For many trafficked individuals, abuse or other trauma-inducing events may have started long before the trafficking process. A traumatic experience often triggers survival responses which engender symptoms of extreme anxiety.

Many survivors of sex trafficking have experienced multiple and reoccurring trauma throughout their lives, beginning as children. This is consistent with the literature related to sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (Wilson & Butler, 2014; Landers, McGrath, Johnson, Armstrong, & Dollard, 2017). Although additional research is needed, there is a growing understanding of trauma-coerced

attachment (TCA) and complex PTSD in individuals who have experienced sex trafficking, perhaps, especially children and youth (Chambers et al., 2022).

Consistent with the literature (Hammond & McGlone, 2014; Heffernan & Blythe, 2014, Nobble, 2020; Dandurand & Chin, 2023), one of the most important program considerations identified by the service providers we interviewed is that services operate from a trauma-informed perspective. Due to the stigma attached to sex work and trafficking, victims often feel judged or blamed for their victimization (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). Research occasionally reports front-line workers' apathy towards the victims' experiences as well a lack of trauma awareness (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). Many of the service providers we interviewed had received some general training in trauma-informed interventions. Most of them thought additional training was still required throughout the sector. One of them suggested a need for more specific training with respect to trauma-informed practices involving children and youth and specific training around trauma related to sex trafficking and involvement in the sex trade more generally.

As Hopper (2017: 12) explained, "a trauma-informed assessment can be the first step in the healing process for many people who have survived trafficking, orienting them towards a path for change and empowering them to face future challenges." A trauma-informed psychological assessment can be an empowering process for survivors (O'Brien, 2018).

An essential aspect of a trauma-informed approach is the relationship between the service user and provider. Indeed, research has revealed that the development of strong interpersonal relationships is a key factor in survivors successfully escaping situations of sexual exploitation. Almost without exception, the service providers we interviewed mentioned the importance of helping sex trafficking survivors build or rebuild relationships. They also emphasized the importance of building rapport with victims during the outreach, intake, and assessment processes. However, it appears that, at least in BC, very few sex trafficking support programs have adopted a specific trauma-informed assessment process.

Stigma Informed Support

Survivors often encounter the stigma attached to participation in the sex industry and, having internalized that stigma, may experience deep feelings of shame. Sex trafficking victims often struggle with addiction; they face social stigmatization as sex workers, as addicts and sometimes also as offenders. Several studies have shown that the stigma attached to sex work is a significant challenge for people in sex work and for individuals hoping to exit the sex economy (Benoit et al., 2018, 2018a, 2020). Many sex workers and sex trafficking victims face the triple social disapproval and stigmas associated with

prostitution, addiction and criminal behaviour. Stigmatized identities do not exist in a vacuum. Intersecting forms of stigma (intersectional stigma[3]) are a daily reality for sex workers and many victims of sex trafficking and expose them to a broad range of vulnerabilities and risks (Turan et al., 2019). Sex workers often live "double lives" and try to manage the stigma and the ongoing difficulty of restricting who knows about their work or what they know about it (Benoit, 2019; Armstrong & Fraser, 2021). They often feel compelled to conceal their identities and use various strategies to do so, including withdrawing themselves from social networks (Wong, 2011).

Sex trafficking victims are understandably guarded in their accounts of their victimization and that they sometimes seem to be sticking to a learned, "acceptable", script. That phenomenon is a very healthy adaptation to a situation where one faces multiple stigmas, negative judgments, ostracization or exclusion. Victims of sex trafficking who are struggling with addiction have often complained about the judgmental attitude of the people who are purportedly trying to support them. The service providers we interviewed frequently mentioned the need to provide victim support without being judgmental, to hear the stories of the survivors' experiences, and to respond with empathy.

Researchers have distinguished between different types of stigmas that tend to be at play for sex trafficking victims; for example, Blakey and Gunn (2018) refer to structural stigma, public stigma, and self-stigma. Whatever the type, social exclusion and stigmatization are especially obstinate obstacles to the social reintegration of victims of sex trafficking. The threat of stigmatization is pervasive and has mental health implications for sex workers and sex trafficking victims. Stigma and the associated discrimination and exclusion are known to have a detrimental impact on an individual's identity, self-concept, self-confidence, agency and overall ability to seek and receive assistance (Benoit, McCarthy and Jansson, 2015, 2015a; Carlson, 2017; Weitzer, 2018; Turan et al., 2019; Rayson & Alba, 2019; Treolar, 2021).

Professionals working with victims of sex trafficking are usually aware, at least generally, of the social stigmatization and discrimination that many victims face (e.g., stigmas associated with criminal conviction, sex work, mental illness, or drug addiction). However, they may not always fully appreciate the debilitating impact of stigma and the associated fears, guilt and self-deprecation, or shame as psychological obstacles to accessing services. For instance, clients' non-disclosure, selective disclosure, vigilance, isolation, or shifting identity can be interpreted as an unwillingness to engage in a program as opposed to a normal self-protection and risk management strategy. For instance, research has revealed that sex workers and former sex workers readily anticipate stigma and avoid disclosing the nature of their work (Koken, 2012), and that concealing stigmatized aspects of one's identity can have negative mental health consequences (Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013).

Mental Health Care and Counselling

The service providers we interviewed usually had a limited capacity, if any, to offer psychological counselling. All of them acknowledged that victims' access to mental health treatment or psychological counselling was very limited. One of them summarized the BC situation as follows:

> "There is also a problem with counselling. Initial counselling is available but providing counselling sessions on an on-going basis is a problem. Few organizations have the resources to offer that kind of support."

Financial Assistance and Access to Financial Tools

The subjects of financial assistance and victims' access to financial tools and institutions were frequently raised during our interview with service providers. One service provider specifically mentioned the "lack of funding for transportation for individuals who have been trafficked to this area to return home". If the individual would like to stay in the area, there is a lack of sustainable financial support because the cost of living is very expensive here, and financial support won't cover all costs".

Legal Assistance

There does not appear to be a study of the legal information and legal assistance needs of victims of sex trafficking. However, it is clear that these needs are both multiple and poorly addressed. Some agencies, including Legal Aid BC are currently considering how trafficking victims can connect with the justice system (criminal, family, civil law, immigration and refugee law). One service provider explained that legal aid is generally available to those who qualify. However, victims often need support in applying for and qualifying for these services. One service provider in northern part of BC related the following experience:

> "A little over a year ago, we partnered with Ending Violence BC. We got funding for legal assistance for survivors (5 hours per client). Unfortunately, there was not a single lawyer (here) who wanted to do the work. The money was not enough to attract. We had to bring in lawyers from Vancouver."

Connection with Law Enforcement and the Justice System

Interviews with service providers and survivors highlighted the often complicated or problematic relationships they entertain with law enforcement.

In Alberta. most of the sex trafficking or sexual exploitation victims interviewed reported having had some contact with the police, although not necessarily in relation to their human trafficking experience. Some of these police contacts referred to violent incidents at home, with an abusive partner, or with a John or a drug supplier. In many instances, they were seeking some form of protection from the police which was not

necessarily forthcoming. Seven of these victims provided further details indicating their negative reporting experiences. Most victims stated that when they reported their experiences to police, the police did not believe them or take their complaints seriously. Some reported being revictimized by investigators through victim-blaming statements such as "why didn't you leave?"

Victims were also asked for suggestions on how to make it safer for victims and survivors to come forward and seek assistance. One of them suggested that exploiters and traffickers need to be charged, convicted, and incarcerated to keep victims safe. She stated that traffickers can too easily track down victims in shelters and safe houses and lure or force them back into exploitive situations. Another victim said: "let survivors speak."

One victim called for a significant investment in funding to prosecute traffickers and referred to an organized crime group in Halifax that has been operating and exploiting women and girls for many years without being 'shut down' or dismantled. The victim explained that with organized crime groups operating like this, avoiding one exploiter does not lead to safety, as other family or crime organization members can still victimize the victim. From her point of view, until traffickers are locked behind bars for significant amounts of time, victims will never feel safe and will hesitate to report offences to the police. Although not discussed with the interviewees, they did not appear to know the prosecution rate of human traffickers has been and remains an abysmal statistic (for a Canadian overview, see Ibrahim, 2021).

The victims interviewed often mentioned that systems – particularly the legal system – need better mechanisms to support victims during reporting, investigations, and court processes. One victim had the following advice to offer: "Don't force people to give statements at police stations. Don't go to detention centres, you're treated as a robot that needs to assimilate." Victims who had reported their victimization to the police spoke about one or more negative interactions regarding being believed, being made to feel heard, and being protected following a disclosure. Those victims who had participated in an investigation and gone to court all reported feeling that they had been revictimized by lawyers, judges, and even some victim support workers. Three victims mentioned the need for judges and lawyers (both prosecutors and defense lawyers) to receive further education and training on human trafficking to implement a more trauma-informed court process to protect and support victims. One victim also called for "better training for health care workers". And finally,

Service providers in BC were also critical of law enforcement. The following is a sample of the opinions they shared with us during interviews:

> "The criminal justice system moves too slowly to be truly helpful, think for example of the length of time it takes to get a case to court. (…) The court system, because of the way it does business, and because of the speed at which they do business, discourages victims from coming forward."

> "Police are not as helpful as they should be because they do not take victims of human trafficking and their situations seriously enough. Police need to build the matter of human trafficking into basic training. Police need to be more educated on what to look for, and on what is needed to encourage victims to come forward. (One of us) regularly attends shift briefing sessions, but as she points out, it takes more than just explaining the issues to officers – there appears to be an attitude/reluctance to act problem among some of them."

> "Police (are) sometimes a source of referrals, but they are not always as helpful as they should be. The fullness and seriousness of client's issues are not always fully appreciated by police (…) it often depends on the officer. Victims do not trust the police. Victims also do not have confidence or trust in the court system to be helpful in a timely manner."

These findings are similar to those of a similar study in Toronto where interviews with survivors of human trafficking showed that "some felt that the police were non-responsive, did not take them seriously, or judged them for being in the sex industry." (Noble et al., 2020: 28). The authors of the study summarized some of their findings as follows:

> "Apart from causing additional risk to vulnerable communities, the lack of action by police reinforces feelings of betrayal and breaks trust with survivors. (…) Another survivor describes how her previous experience with the police resulted in her feeling hesitant to report acts of violence committed against her. (…) Other survivors, however, spoke highly about their encounters with the police, suggesting that when police work to establish a rapport, the outcome can be very positive."

Support for Victims of Labour Trafficking

Labour trafficking is an extreme form of exploitation which is specifically criminalized but exists within a much broader continuum of exploitation. The notion of a continuum helps describe the complexity of the exploitative environment and concrete individual situations of exploited workers, with labour trafficking and forced labour at one end of this continuum because they involve coercion, deception, and denial of freedom. A focus solely on trafficking for forced labour can obscure the larger structural and contextual factors that facilitate exploitation and make workers vulnerable to labour trafficking (Dandurand, 2017).

Temporary foreign workers (TFWs) are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and labour trafficking. TFWs receive employer-specific work permits that restrict them to working for one employer only. They are not free to change employers. TFWs depend on their employers not only for their jobs, but also their ability to remain in Canada. These workers are frequently threatened with deportation if they complain about their working conditions. Understandably, TFWs rarely file complaints against abusive employers. As was noted by the BC Employment Standards Coalition (2017: 40), "the ESB's complaint-driven model of enforcement is detrimental to the rights of TFWs". However, there is also a lack of proactive enforcement of labour standards and investigations of workplaces that employ TFWs. It is often suggested that Canadian human trafficking law remains incomplete and fails to address situations of forced labour: "There is a need to think creatively about recourses" (Matte Guilmain & Hanley, 2021: 130).

For many migrant workers, the ultimate goal may not be the short-term goal of earning wages, but the longer-term goal of permanent residence or even citizenship in a new country. This can obviously be used by unscrupulous employers (false promises of sponsorship, withdrawal of sponsorship, threats of firing, etc.) to manipulate and exploit workers. The threat of denunciation and deportation, especially for irregular migrants, creates a situation where migrant workers may not be physically constrained but nevertheless have their freedom of movement curtailed. Other threats take many forms and are often subtle and implicit; their impact is mainly psychological but very effective at intimidating the workers and preventing them from seeking assistance (Dandurand, 2012).

Although they were sometimes aware of labour trafficking taking place in their own community, very few of the service providers we interviewed were actively involved in providing services to victims of labour trafficking. One of them noted: "Sex trafficking is more visible and an easier political target. Labour trafficking gets a lot less attention. It is not as sensational. There are no splashy headlines." Another service provider, thinking perhaps of migrant workers, believe that there is a simple way of preventing their exploitation: "If the government really wants to help labour trafficking victims, they should simply give them citizenship".

One service provider shared the following observations with us:

> 'What I find in labour trafficking clients, they present as workaholic, and they are often subservient, compliant. Their needs are unspoken and easy to ignore. It is in fact one of their coping strategies in order to survive: 'If I comply, I will not get punished as much, I might be able to last a little longer'."

Another service provider offered the following analysis:

> "The survivors of labour trafficking are under-researched and ignored in terms of the needs of our clients. They present very differently. They appear to not need help; they are easy to ignore. They cope differently and more independently, but even when they are tortured systematically, they are willing to compromise their own health, ignored their physical ailments, push through an injury to support their family. They define their own worth in terms of their ability to support their family (as a provider). They are willing to sacrifice eating as they feel guilty because their families need food. They are willing to compromise their safety for immigration status."

One service provider explained that "setting aside all of your own hopes, wants, needs, and worries in an attempt to satisfy someone else's is never a good thing. In fact, it's a trauma response known as fawning". They added:

> "When they present to social services, they (labour trafficking victims) are managing independently. Their identity is as a survivor. They will endure hardship to continue to provide support for their family – that's what most important to them. (…) I met a person in a nasty forced marriage situation who was sad that she had not been able to wait until she could claim a common law status: 'If only I had waited for a few months more'."

Finally, two service providers mentioned that labour exploitation is also an issue within the sex trade, as migrants they are not allowed to be involved in the sex economy. Immigration regulations designed to prevent the migration of and enable the deportation of temporary residents who do sex work were introduced in 2012. The *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* state that temporary residents are "not to enter into an employment agreement, or extend the term of an employment agreement, with an employer who, regularly, offers striptease, erotic dance, escort services or erotic massages."[4]

Services for migrant workers

We heard from service providers that there is often too much speculation and assumptions about the needs of labour trafficking victims. These victims, we were told, have very specific needs. Some of their priority needs, as identified by service providers, include public transportation, shelter and transition housing, short-term financial assistance, and legal information and assistance.

It was suggested that BC Immigrant and migrant services have made a lot of progress in understanding and being alert to the situation of labour trafficking victims. For

[4] See *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations*; Sections 183.1, 196.1, 200.3. http://bit.ly/2FStw61

example, MOSAIC's SAFE project aims to support the mental well-being and recovery of immigrants, refugees and migrant survivors of human trafficking and to enhance the capacity of settlement service providers to support survivors of human trafficking and those at risk. One of its goals is also to advance knowledge and awareness of human trafficking among at-risk immigrant, refugee and migrant populations.[5]

Organizations such as the Migrant Workers Centre (MWC) or the Vernon & District Immigrant and Community Services (VDICSS) dedicate themselves to legal advocacy for migrant workers in British Columbia, advancing the rights of migrant workers, and providing access to justice through legal education, legal advice, and representation in legal proceedings. Some of them provide settlement services for new immigrants. These organizations are often in contact with workers in situations of labour exploitation or labour trafficking. One of these urgent needs is their need for legal assistance. Existing services include free legal assistance, including advice on immigration status, employment standards and other civil law complaints. These organizations can also provide referrals to other support services, such as housing and health care.

Service providers often mentioned that the goal should be to offer support to labour trafficking victims not just in a reactive way but also proactively. They also referred to the systemic barriers to access to justice faced by their clients. Some of them thought that the COVID-19 pandemic had intensified the need for creative ways to provide access to services. Migrant workers were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Many of them worked in positions such as caregivers and farm workers, and in locations such as factories and care facilities, putting them at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19. As they lost their job, they became more vulnerable to losing their immigration status and more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation.

One service provider from the Greater Vancouver area explained why they thought her agency was not often contacted by labour trafficking victims: "There have been a few cases of victims of labour exploitation, but not at our Centre – for example, Filipina women who worked as health care workers or domestic worker. They are hard to reach out to. They keep to themselves."

One pilot project by an agency active in settlement programs supports a temporary foreign workers program for farm workers in the BC Interior (a pilot program since March 2021, funded until 2024). It offers outreach and support services to these

[5] That program created a library of resources on prevention and intervention strategies. That library is shared with other organizations working with at-risk populations. See: https://mosaicbc.org/our-resource/safe-project/.

workers, sometimes living on a farm in a remote area. One of the program's support worker described the work as follows:

> We go to the farms and contact the workers and create awareness about the programs available to them and help them access different services in the community, like health, dentist, optometrist, or food. We also provide referrals to other services. However, getting access to the farms is not always easy: some employers don't want to see us. They think that we are going to access information they want to keep secret, mostly about illegal practices or their breaking the law. However, only a few farms have completely denied us access."

Migrant victims are technically eligible for consulate services from their own country. The service providers who had an opinion on the matter were generally very critical of these services. The following exert from an interview seems to capture the general sentiment expressed by the service providers we interviewed:

> "Consulate services are useless; I say that after having talked to people in other agencies who have been in this field for 10 years. The place workers can complain is the consulate, but a lot of them don't do that because the consulate favours its friendly relationships with employer. The consulates tend to take the employers' side. One consulate would make a list of complaining workers and the list was passed to the employers. When they contact the consulate, the workers are sometimes told things like 'Are you here to work or to complain'."

Language and limited literacy are also obstacles frequently preventing labour trafficking victims from accessing services or reporting their victimization to the authorities. Service providing agencies try to recruit staff with the relevant language skills and try to retain the services of translators and interpreters (sometimes volunteers) but that is not always enough to reach out to victims and build trusting relationships. Service providers also made the following observations during their interview:

> "One of the problems is that services for vulnerable people are not offered in their language."

> "The team has identified low literacy levels as a challenge in reaching immigrants and refugees, yet the resources produced for these populations are quite text heavy and include a lot of information."

> "The waiting lists for counselling and legal services is long, but that does not always matter because these services are not offered in a language that the victims understand."

Outreach and Victim Identification

Victims of labour trafficking do not come forward for a variety of reasons, generally involving fear of deportation, accusations of participation in illegal activities, or compromising their chance of achieving landed immigrant status. Various steps can be taken to mitigate these fears and encourage these victims to seek protection and assistance.

It is unfortunately not always in labour trafficking victims' interest to ask for the protection of the authorities. By reporting their victimization to police, victims of labour trafficking may be exposing themselves to a host of other risks, including retaliation by the offenders or their accomplices, deportation, penalties, and even persecution in their own country upon their return. To increase reporting by victims the risks involved for them must be mitigated (Dandurand, 2017).

Common barriers to reporting – and identifying oneself as a victim of labour trafficking - include the fear of deportation, the fear of immigration enforcement proceedings, the lack of financial and social support, and the fear of reprisal actions from the employers. The lack of local housing alternatives and income support for migrant workers exiting an abusive employment situation is also a factor. Debt and debt bondage is sometimes underestimated by service providers. The victims' debt burden is often used by their exploiters to manipulate and control them. The debt incurred by the victims is not suddenly erased by virtue of the fact that they have reported their victimization to the authorities (Dandurand, 2017).

The motivation for the client to come forward is harder for foreign nationals. The threats are not limited to the Canadian context. As one of the victims interviewed explained:

> "Many employers in Canada have connections with political parties and organized crime in the country where the victims come from. They are rich and powerful men, gangsters and politicians in the home country which can make a lot of trouble for you. The employers can use that to blackmail you, threaten you."

We heard that reaching out to foreign workers is not easy. Building relationships with them can be challenging, given their circumstances. Service providers explained:

> "Most of the time the workers are scared to speak out. They need to support their family and send money home. They are totally dependent on the employer."

> "Workers are not too friendly with us. At first, they did not even want our business cards. They are too scared. Working conditions are often extremely

> bad. In some instances, we reported the situation. When you do the farmers kick you out and they don't give you access to workers anymore."
>
> "When you get a whole farm where everybody is being mistreated, no one is standing up, it is a very different situation."
>
> "There is sometimes pressure from fellow workers, who are also scared of losing their job. Some workers are completely barred from working anywhere. They are blacklisted here and also by the agents in their own country".
>
> Exploitation takes different forms and workers feel helpless. For example, workers are prevented from reporting working place accidents to workplace BC and fired if they do. In one case, "we had to travel to a distant farm. Employers were charging the workers $350.00 for COVID test every two weeks which they said were compulsory."

Three of the victims we interviewed talked about the problem with Canada's temporary workers system. One of them explained: "We can only work for one employer. We cannot change job. If we change, we have to pay $3,000.00. Nobody wants to pay that and wait for eight months for a new working permit." Another one explained: "(Employment) agencies and immigration consultants take a lot of money. I spent $10,000 and 15,000 for my second job. You cannot go back home with so much debt."

A compromised immigration status is typically a huge obstacle to labour trafficking victims' access to assistance. Work permits and the way they are administered also complicates matters for many foreign workers. One service provider referring to the current work permits regime commented:

> "Labour trafficking is the government's fault. They put them (temporary foreign workers) in a vulnerable situation because of closed work permits. (…) For example, a year ago we got in contact with a lady working in a restaurant who was abused psychologically and who feared for her thirteen-year-old daughter. The employer, among other things, had cut her access to the internet and tried to intimidate and isolate her. He (the employer) and his son were doing parties with underage girls and the victim was scared for her daughter. She was able to flee and relocate to a friend's house. She had a closed working permit, and we help her get an open permit. Getting an open work permit is relatively easy if you have the proof."

One of the victims we interviewed complained that "with a closed work permit, you have no option". She added: "Human trafficking is not going to stop unless workers like me are allowed to work with an open work permit". Another victim expressed her frustration as follows: "It is as if the whole system is designed to keep us vulnerable and force us to put up with bad employers. The whole system favours employers". One

victim explained that many abusive Canadian employers have close family connections or connections with powerful people and “they can make a lot of trouble for you and your family back home. (…) that employer can blackmail you, threaten you. Coming forward to get help is not safe. Nothing happens to these employers; they just keep hiring more people and exploiting them.”

Access to Support and Assistance

During the interviews, labour trafficking victims tried to impress upon us that accessing support is far from straightforward. The stories they shared with us give us an idea of the difficulties they encountered.

One of the victims, who legally came to work in Canada, recounted how she narrowly escaped her abusers only to fall again into the trap of an unscrupulous employment agent who delivered her to another abusive employer. The second time she escaped such a situation, she found herself alone, in the winter, without any money or a place to stay. She called the police and waited for a long time, but they did not show up. When she called the police for the second time, the person at the dispatch centre was impatient and rude and told her that her situation "was not a police matter". She was not referred to any service or emergency assistance. It is important to note that at that time she was worried that the police would be contacted by her abusive employer and perhaps falsely accused of something like stealing since her employer had repeatedly threatened her to do so. She wanted to explain to the police that she had run away to escape further abuse and had not committed any offence. The same day she remembered that a friend who had once worked with her for the same employer had given her the contact information for the agency that supports human trafficking victims. She contacted the agency. She was given a $10.00 Tim Horton gift card and was housed for over two weeks at a local shelter for homeless people she described it as a challenging environment where most people smoke, drank, used drugs, and often suffered from mental illness. Eventually, the victim connected with her family, who supported her financially. She was able to access other support services.

Another victim of labour trafficking, a foreign farm worker in British Columbia, who was forced to work in an abusive situation tried to access help by using the phone of another worker. Other workers were terrified that this attempt to get help would bring law enforcement attention and that they would all lose their job and be deported. They tried to convince him not to seek help. One day, when he fell ill, he was sent to the hospital where he was able to talk to someone who spoke his language. He was helped and supported by a local agency and received free legal assistance from an immigration lawyer so that he could continue working in Canada and pay the debt he had incurred with an immigration consultant in his own country. He was never able to collect his wages or his personal belongings from the abusive employer. He does not know what

happened to the other workers. He is hoping to be able to go back home as soon as he earns enough money.

Some labour victims complained about the role of unscrupulous, dishonest, or incompetent immigration consultants and employment agencies in Canada and abroad, who are complicit in labour trafficking.

Victims expressed how they are angered by the fact that nothing is happening to their employer and that they are left alone to fight for compensation or at the very least get paid for their work. One should not underestimate the importance of compensation for achieving sustainable protection solutions for trafficked persons (Baglay, 2021). However, it appears that victims of labour trafficking have very few effective remedies available to them, for example, regaining lost wages or obtaining compensation for an injury. There are few available recourses for labour trafficking victims although labour law remedies, at least theoretically, can be an option to obtain financial compensation for the victims (Matte Guilmain & Hanley, 2021). Unfortunately, the time and resources needed to process a claim or obtain restitution is enough to deter the workers from taking advantage of existing recourses. Victims often assume that they are unlikely to get compensation from the offender and do not pursue any recourse avenue. Many of them want to or have to leave the country, making it challenging to pursue remedies.

Several service providers mentioned that more must be done to meet labour victims' legal information and assistance, including for matters relating to Employment Standards Board claims, ESB claims, criminal court, are family and civil court.

Law enforcement

With respect to their working relationship with law enforcement agencies, some service providers had reservations about how much they could cooperate with the authorities, especially immigration authorities. One of them explained: "Our job is to support the immigrants. Not to uphold the law and report the abuses." Apparently, referrals to the police are very rare and sometimes feel "pointless". One service provider recounted:

> "I had a case where a worker had been arrested and spent a night in jail. There was another guy who was a foreign worker but was abusing the other workers. The employers get one guy who enforces the rules and harasses the workers. In one case, we had to call the RCMP and report the case to the immigration agency. Even after all that, the guy kept reapplying for work permits."

Another service provider said:

> "Law enforcement is not doing much about labour trafficking (…) because it involves financial gains and tends to be treated as a civil matter. By

> comparison, the moral aspect of sex trafficking is engaging public opinion. We are othering the consumer and the providers. The same is not true of labour trafficking."

As one service provider explained, reporting an abusive employer or a trafficker is a risky business:

> "Last September, a new anonymous call line was established at IRCC (for abuse in the workplace, with language translation). One of the workers called and at the end, when they called him back, he just said that everything was fine and that he did not want to get in trouble. It is not safe to report. If you do, you know you will not be called again to work next year."

It was often suggested during the interviews with service providers that there are extremely few investigations conducted in BC involving labour trafficking. A common theme among service providers who work with labour trafficking victims was the need for more inspection of worksites and more proactive investigations. Their suggestions included:

> "Inspectors are never to be seen. The biggest thing is when we send reports to inspectors (Immigration Services)."

> "We need more spot checking, not putting it all on the victims to report and take action. We should enforce a standard of care. Just like food safe."

> "Investigations are complicated because, in many instances, the workers are gone (…). Spot checks on employers are badly needed."

> "Spot checks has been brought up a lot. However, even when they are fined or blacklisted, the employers apply again under a different name, for example the wife's name. There is so much corruption."

One of the victims interviewed who ran away from a forced labour situation related how the police failed to take her call for help seriously. She said: "If police don't response, what can you do. I did not know what to do."

Support for Children and Youth Victims

Commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth under the age of 18 years is any type of sexual activity with children and youth in exchange for money, drugs, food, shelter or any other considerations. This is the case whether or not the children or youth involved consider themselves to be consenting. Sexual exploitation of children and youth is never considered consensual and often amounts to human trafficking. However, as one of the service providers we interviewed wanted to stress,

> "When we discuss child exploitation and how to help child victims, we need not be too concerned about legal definitions. We take a youth's rights

> approach. Sexual and other forms of child and youth exploitation is a disregard for their rights. We focus with youth on their rights to boundaries, to safety, to freedom".

Several service providers working with youth were skeptical about the use of the concept of human trafficking:

> "The use of the words 'human trafficking' is a problem for us. Many people don't even realize that they have been trafficked. This is not how they describe their situation. Even when they think that they were victims of human trafficking (e.g., deceived or coerced into participating in the sex economy), that is not something they like to admit to others (and sometimes not even to themselves). They also fear the stigmas attached to trafficking and prostitution."

Some service providers also noted that, from the perspective of trying to empower service recipients, the words "victims" or "survivors" were also problematic: "We do not wish to encourage our clients to see themselves or define themselves as victims. Our goal is to empower them and encourage agency".

Service providers explained that, in their experience, many, if not most, of the youth victims of sexual exploitation they encounter are involved with child protection services and that working with child protection authorities is essential even if at times it can be "frustrating". As some researchers have already observed, sex trafficking and child welfare are linked in any least two important ways, twofold, youth who are extracted from trafficking are often placed in child welfare to enhance their protection and youth involved in child welfare are at risk for recruitment while in-care (Bounds, Julion, & Delaney, 2015; Baird et al., 2019).

One service provider explained that we must be careful about making assumptions about vulnerability or who are the children and youth most vulnerable to sexual exploitation: "Children can be vulnerable in so many ways; when I look at my own caseload it seems to me that these children and youth come from anywhere and everywhere". One organization reported that many international students are caught in both labour and sexual trafficking schemes, some of these schemes operating across borders. The problem, it was suggested, "is more serious than people think". Another service provider remarked:

> "There are a lot of international students in our area. Foreign students can also be vulnerable, but not as much. We did a great job of making the colleges and university responsible for students (however, not so much in the summer when services are reduced)." "HT among college students, especially international students. International students become pray to traffickers. We are starting to see that, in part because the University and the college are more aggressively

> recruiting internationally. At some point, there were West African men registering at the university for the purpose of trafficking young Indigenous girls. The police intervened in this case."

Services are needed to ensure that young people are not only freed from a trafficking situation but given the resources for long-term sustainability. Research has emphasized the importance of providing youth with individualized services and support; nonjudgmental, voluntary, and low-threshold services that meet the basic needs of youth without criminal justice system involvement are needed (Dank et al., 2016). Many organizations nationwide offer programs that help guide child victims through their healing process (O'Brien et al., 2019). However, their ability to identify and reach out to youth at risk or victims of human trafficking is sometimes limited. Service providers in BC, as elsewhere, reported that young people's initial and continued engagement is a constant challenge for them. The barriers are significant.

The service providers we interviewed all recognized the importance of working with communities and law enforcement to develop prevention, education, enforcement, and intervention strategies to address the sexual exploitation of children and youth.
Every March, British Columbia proclaims "Stop the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth Awareness Week" to raise awareness about sexual exploitation and human trafficking in the province. The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General has produced a publication on "Stopping the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth"[6]. The ministry has also been promoting the establishment of Community Action Teams (CATs), including service providers and community partners, to develop and implement local strategies that address prostitution and sexual exploitation. A toolkit for service providers and families was also developed by the Stop Exploiting Youth (SEY) team at Pacific Community Resources Society (PCRS).[7]

There are programs for sexually exploited youth throughout the Lower Mainland (e.g., SEY; Onyx). These are well-established programs, some with nearly 20 years of existence, targeting youth between the ages of 13 and 18. They focus on outreach and support services to sexually exploited youth. They typically provide no barrier, fast-response services tailored to the youth's strengths, needs and circumstances. Their strength usually resides in their ability to mobilize community resources and services providers working with law enforcement and child protection agencies. The programs

[6] Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. *Stopping the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth.* https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/crime-prevention/community-crime-prevention/publications/crime-prev-series2-sexual-exploitation-children-youth.pdf

[7] Yaqub, N. & Rose, T. (2021). *Prevention the Sexual Exploitation of Children and youth in the Lower mainland: A toolkit for service providers, parents and caregivers*. Pacific Community Resources Society (PCRS). https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qt_XXEfWWG7c911o1da-S5k9mSSZ6C_-/view

involve workers who meet with youth in their communities, individualized support, flexible hours of operation, and connections to other supports. Program staff report that their clients are primarily girls, street entrenched, often with addiction issues, some homeless or living in a tent. They are as young as 11-year-old and have little or no family support, many of them have been in the care of the state. They are all very vulnerable.

There are other service providers whose principal focus is on helping homeless youth or youth with addiction issues who frequently encounter youth victims of human trafficking or sexual exploitation. Recognizing that homelessness is a risk factor, as are various intersectional aspects (e.g., queer identify, family rejection, housing, addiction, etc.), they recognize their duty to provide evidence-based assistance. Some agencies have adopted a no-wrong-door approach and are prepared in each of their programs to engage with youth who are exploited or at risk of exploitation. One agency explained that: "As an organization, we fit in the middle of the range of service delivery agencies, dealing mostly with youth who do not yet recognize that they are exploited or do not understand the risks they are facing. We fit in the early identification and early intervention phase of the continuum of services." That agency has included a part in the intake process of all its youth programs to facilitate disclosure of sexual exploitation and other safety issues. Upon a positive screening, workers can help the youth pivot to programs specifically relevant to their situation. Other service providers within the agency can be notified and brought in.

The Covenant House programs fit into anti-human trafficking work as a crisis entry point. Due to the nature of their work, they are less frequently involved with survivors engaged in a healing journey. Most individuals who engage with the programs are at risk due to their circumstances (family neglect, homelessness, discrimination, newcomer, etc.): "Youth who are actively being trafficked mostly utilize our harm reduction supplies and information, our outreach support, or shelter beds but they fluctuate in exiting and returning to their trafficker." Participation in gay-for-pay schemes (not being gay) makes some youth especially vulnerable; these youth do not always engage with available assistance resources.

There are also youth sexual exploitation prevention programs which focus primarily on public education and awareness raising, as well as preventive interventions with at risk youth (e.g., Justice Education Society's Coalition Against Sexually Exploited Youth (CASEY), Children of the Street). For example, CASEY is a community awareness and mobilization in northern BC, managed by the Justice Education Society (JES) working with the Friendship Centre in Prince George.

One service provider observed that:

> "The character of victims is changing. Although the average age is fifteen, victims are getting younger (increasingly more likely to be 12-13 years old). About 70% are South Asian, about 50% are middle class, and the percentage of Aboriginals they deal with is declining. Obviously, the changing demographics of Surrey has played a part in these changes, but nonetheless, there is over-representation."

Youth who come in contact with service providers are not necessarily ready or trying to leave the sex trade. As researchers have previously observed,

> "Young people engaged in sex trades as the least-bad solution to meeting fundamental needs for shelter, safety, social connection, and love. Sex trafficking was never the only problem, and often not the most critical problem in the youth's live." (Gibbs et al., 2015)

Identification of Youth Victims and Outreach

There are many reasons why victims of human trafficking or sexual exploitation do not come forward for assistance. According to one service provider: "They (the victims) don't know whom to trust. They fear retaliation. They fear their exploiter. They fear the authorities, and, in many cases, fear being deported. Is it ever safe for victims to report or talk openly about their situation (victimization)?" Another participant added "They usually don't come to us; we have to try to meet them where they are at and try to build a relationship with them. By meeting them where they are at, I mean literally where they hang out but also where they are at in their mind." Front line workers mentioned that "connecting with these kids must be done carefully. They are naturally suspicious, but they are also under pressure by their exploiters not to engage with people like us."

Outreach services should be low-barrier and support those currently in the sex industry from a harm reduction perspective. As noted in an Ontario study, "building rapport and providing services to youth who consider their participation in the sex industry to be consensual can reduce risks while allowing for contacts to be developed should clients or their peers find themselves in an exploitative situation" (Nobble et al., 2020: 70). It is often suggested that outreach programs for youth should target locations where youth are being approached by those who would exploit them: on social media, in transportation stations, in recreational spaces, or at government assistance offices (Murphy, 2016).

Some of the service providers interviewed related that the youth accessing their services had been referred to them mostly by family members, schools and law enforcement. It was also noted that most youth seeking assistance from service providers do not self-identify as having experienced trafficking. Some service

providers explained why they do not necessarily know much about a young client's victimization experience. It often takes time before a youth is ready to talk about his or her victimization experience. The service providers' primary goal, the added, is to meet the youth's most immediate needs. One service provider remarked:

> "I don't believe it would be appropriate or safe for youth to speak about their experience of trafficking or exploitation. I completely understand how it could be beneficial for them to be interviewed about their experience but we need to focus on tangible supports with the time we have to work with them."

Gang Involvement

The role of criminal gangs was often mentioned by the services providers we consulted. Several service providers and some law enforcement officials emphasized the role of gangs in recruiting and sexually exploiting youth, including for pornography. Some ventured to guess that at least one-third of sexually exploited youth are under the direct or indirect control of gangs, being intimidated, exploited, moved, purchased or sold. Unfortunately, there is no data to support or contradict these claims. Little research is available on the involvement of girls in gangs in British Columbia or the link between gang involvement and sexual exploitation. Thirteen years ago, a community consultation project completed by the Fraser Valley Community Action Team (FVCAT – now known as the Abbotsford Community Action Team)) noted that, although a review of the literature indicated that girls are increasingly exploited by gangs in both Canada and the United States, the community consultation showed that there were few cases emerging in the Lower Mainland; at that point, local stakeholders were reporting that few of their female youth clients were known to be sexually exploited by gangs.[8] However, one service provider in Surrey reported that, in their experience of working with youth victims of sex trafficking, "most victimization is gang-related, and less than 30% (of the youth) completely exit from their gang association."

One service provider was of the view that gang affiliation itself should be regarded as a form of exploitation and that youth frequently experience a fear of violence from gangs:

> "Drug debts is a huge vulnerability for many of them. Threats to family members, or a pet, are frequent. Because intergenerational gang involvement is so frequent, there are often some complicated situations. A lot of the youth

[8] Abbotsford Youth Commission (2010). Gangs, Girls and Sexual Exploitation in British Columbia: Community Consultation Paper. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/crime-prevention/community-crime-prevention/publications/gang-prevention-girls-sexual-exploitation.pdf

> we work with carry knifes, bear spray, and other weapons. Drug withdrawal is also a problem."

Law enforcement initiatives focused on gang activities related to the sexual exploitation of youth are rarely reported. In fact, the relative priority attached to controlling these activities as part of gang interdiction or suppression law enforcement strategies, often seems quite low compared to the importance attached to drug or firearms control or other nefarious gang activities.

Service Delivery Challenges

Many of the youth served by the various BC organizations consulted are from other provinces. They are often running away often from exploitation. Youth often see British Columbia as the best place in Canada to be homeless. It was suggested that action should be taken to facilitate the sharing of missing persons reports across provinces. One service provider suggested that some action should be taken to facilitate the sharing of missing persons reports across provinces."

Service providers we interviewed lamented the lack of specialized physical and mental health care for trafficked children, as well as the frequent delays experienced by the children and youth to trying to access these services. The problem is not unique to this region (Albright et al., 2020). It was suggested that improving both access to these services and the quality of these services may require an assessment of existing services and their ability to address the specific needs of trafficked children and youth.

SEY programs and other service providers have noticed a significant shift to exploitation occurring in online settings. Young people who historically could be reached by program staff in face-to-face interactions are now increasingly difficult to reach and connect with as they have found new friendships through online platforms. The grooming and recruiting mostly occurs online, on the youth's phone.

Some service providers have developed strong street level outreach activities. Such activities, however, tend to require close, day-to-day, partnerships with local law enforcement. Service providers explained that police support is especially important for the safety of the youth and the staff, especially when young people live with much older men or are exploited by local gangs. In some instances, outreach staff are able to build strong rapport with the dedicated police officers and these officers are willing to take a report and press charges, sometimes resulting in successful prosecutions and convictions. However, it was reported that the level of cooperation that can be expected from the police tends to vary over time and between jurisdictions. The priority attached to street-level child protection interventions may vary depending on the individual officers involved and the priority their supervisors attach to this kind of work.

Moreover, for these street level outreach interventions to be successful they must often take place at night and during weekends when dedicated police and youth support resources are not always available.

One service provider had found a way to improve collaboration with the police:

> "Three of the staff are retired police officers. They were able to develop positive relationships with RCMP officers – some of them. In my own experience of working with the RCMP, this is not always the case, but having retired officers on our staff has made a huge difference in terms of the police's willingness to work with us as a non-profit agency."

Additionally, as the youth often move from one community to another, the need for law enforcement support is not limited to one police jurisdiction and calls for law enforcement cooperation at the local and reginal levels. One service provider explained:

> "Many of our girls are travelling – Surrey, Richmond, Mission, Abbotsford, and other places – we cannot get to the bottom of where they are going or who they are with. There is a lot of movement back and forth. That's when it becomes dangerous for us workers – and there are certain places where we cannot go anymore because it has been a threatening space for both the girls and for us."

Service providers found it difficult to understand why law enforcement agencies are not more rigorously investigating and prosecuting traffickers.

> "We recently had a file involving a young trans who clearly had been trafficked. The police and Crown did not even think of investigating it. They did not even see it as a case of HT."

> "In their view (police and prosecutors), the victims are not seen as 'credible victims', because somehow, they may have been partly responsible for their own victimization. They do not acknowledge the complexity of the victim-perpetrator relationship."

> "The networks of traffickers are not affected. The police have that 'won and done' practice. Also, one conviction is enough for the police – there is no follow-up on networks."

Service providers identified several services for youth victims. There is always a need for more safe spaces and accommodation for at-risk youth or those escaping an exploitation situation. Also, there is a need for services for youth who have "aged out" of youth program. Some may be eligible for gang prevention programs, but outreach services are quite limited. Service providers also emphasized the need for better strategies to reach out to and connect with youth through social media.

Service providers also reported that there are so many youth at risk or in exploitative situations that existing programs cannot meet the need. Service providers must prioritize their activities. Some of them prioritize working with youth, especially girls, who are being trafficking or at risk of being trafficked, for example youth who have been moved away from their home region or are currently being moved, including across the border. Some service providers have a "waitlist" of potential clients.

Access to Existing Services and Support

Access is the ease of experience for victims and survivors to get the support they need, when and how they need it. The sex trafficking victims interviewed for this study invariably reported difficulties in gaining access to the assistance and support they needed. Several reported that some of the services they accessed were unsuitable, insufficient, or inadequate. Some of them were upset because of the judgmental and dismissive attitude of some individual service providers who did not seem to understand sex trafficking or the needs and circumstances of survivors. Some of them concluded that the services they needed were simply not available. In addition, all the participants noted that accessing services was difficult due to various barriers. The most common complaint was about the long waitlists for services. When victims were finally ready to seek help, they were often turned away and told that they would be contacted for an intake in several weeks or months. They described feeling hopeless and said they would often return to their exploiters because at least some of their essential needs were met. For example, one victim said the services she sought were "prohibitive because of cost, timing/delays, and the difficulty of accessing other supports when the sessions ran out". Three victims pointed out that when they finally got access to services, the duration of support.

The labour trafficking victims we interviewed had received very little assistance from anyone. In some cases, they had received some limited legal assistance and referrals to emergency shelters or financial assistance. In other instances, they had purchased the service. In the case of foreign workers, their search for support and assistance was limited because of a fear of either compromising their immigration status or being deported. They kept a low profile and relied for support and information on informal social networks, church contacts, and other workers. One of them explained how he had been compromised by his exploiter who had forced him to engage in criminal activities (in his case, packaging drugs and including them in pizza deliveries). He felt that, in such cases, it is risky for the victims to ask for help from people they don't know that they can trust.

Service availability is an issue for all victims of human trafficking, but possibly more so for victims of labour trafficking. Their needs differ in many ways from the needs of

sex trafficking victims. Even those agencies which purport to offer services to all victims of human trafficking have geared their services primarily to meet the needs of victims of sex trafficking or other forms of sexual exploitation. One labour trafficking victim, speaking about the experience of a friend who was also a labour trafficking victim, explained that the people to whom her friend turned to get help kept asking her if she was not also exploited sexually. She inferred from that that a claim of sexual exploitation would facilitate access to services including, in this case, a request for an extended work permit.

In Alberta eight of the eleven victims who were interviewed talked about the lack of trauma-informed and human trafficking-specific services available to victims. They discussed how most agencies they went to did not appear to understand how to identify, engage, and support a victim of sexual exploitation and trafficking. The service providers surveyed in that province referred to the long waitlists for certain programs and services, a general lack of resources, and how program eligibility criteria disqualify individuals from receiving help. Other barriers identified included fear and/or a lack of trust, lack of awareness of where to turn, geographic isolation, and language and/or cultural barriers. They often deplored the lack of programs/beds for emergency placement for sex trafficking victims.

Accessing funding for transportation for victims who need to leave the area for their protection or to return home was another frequently mentioned issue. In fact, accessing financial support in a timely manner was a challenge for most victims.

Barriers to Accessing Services

During the initial survey, service providers were asked about the barriers which may prevent human trafficking survivors from accessing or utilizing the services they offer. Several views were offered, including:

(1) survivors' lack of knowledge about existing service

(2) a lack of access to information, cell phones and internet resources, particularly in remote areas

(3) survivors' fear and distrust of institutions and agencies that could be of assistance

(4) language and cultural barriers

(5) survivors' feeling of shame and ongoing stigmatization and their hesitation to disclose their victimization and their need for assistance

(6) survivors' lack of access to transportation

(7) the limitations of the assistance provided by the organization because of a lack of capacity and funding

(8) the long-term debilitating effects of trauma which limits he survivors' agency and makes it difficult for them to seek and accept help

(9) the struggle with addiction and recovery which many survivors of sex trafficking experience

The main challenge, according to many agencies, comes from the fact that the resources available to provide such services are limited and unevenly distributed. This, in turn, risks creating a cycle of challenges and frustrations for both human trafficking survivors and service providers.

It was also suggested that the service providers' ideological position or philosophy of intervention may deter some survivors from approaching them for assistance. One organization noted: "Possibly our political position of ending the sex industry is being misconstrued as not caring about exploited individuals, which is the furthest from the truth, it why we do this so no one else is exploited but there are those in the media who like to misrepresent us."

It was also noted that many human trafficking survivors need time and may not be immediately ready for assistance; service providers do not always recognize the "red flags" and the difficulties experienced by survivors in disclosing their victimization and its consequences. Some of these victims are still in a very coercive or exploitative situation and fear for their safety; some of them are prevented by others from seeking help.

It was also mentioned that in some situations, an organization's service eligibility criteria specifically block access to certain individuals (for example, a residential shelter program that does now allow for substance use on site). Several service providers insisted on the importance of providing victims with access to low-barrier or low-threshold services and facilities, especially for shelter and housing. One service provider explained that "our doors used to be closed to kids who were still engaged in sex work; they were sleeping upstairs of strip clubs. Our policy change was important to remove barriers."

In the BC Lower Mainland, recent project-based programs for women involved in the sex trade, including victims of sex trafficking, aimed at "Widening the Gate: Brokering Education, Access, and Resources". The programs demonstrated how many female survivors of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation had repeatedly experienced the limits of the assistance available until a helping intervention, based on

an intensive case management approach, finally helped them through a very difficult transition.

Other barriers identified by service providers included.

- Access to technology is an issue for some victims or individuals at risk of trafficking, especially foreign victims without a Canadian phone number.
- The lack of continuity in the provision of services to victims with complex or long-term needs for support.
- Poor case management and supervision practices
- Service delivery challenges
- Insufficient protection provided to victims
- Language and cultural barriers
- Lack of coordination between service providers

Some service providers suggested that quality standards should perhaps be established and enforced. For example, one of them said:

> "Our Advisory Committee suggested that there should be some kind of auditing tool to ensure that the agencies purporting to offer services to human trafficking victims are actually qualified and capable of doing so. There perhaps should be some certification or accreditation process."

Interagency Cooperation

The BC Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons (OCTIP) was supposed to help coordinate and support interagency collaboration but it is no longer very active. Other initiatives are underway to promote greater communication and information exchanges among service providers. Many agencies have created their own advisory groups. People are looking for actionable items, but it seems that more concrete collaboration initiatives have yet to be developed.

It was suggested that, for example, service providers could pool their resources and develop more standardized and specific evidence-based based approaches and tools for safety planning for victims and survivors of human trafficking or sexual exploitation, perhaps different tools for youth and adult victims.

In B.C., the Justice Education Society (JES), based on consultations with one hundred organizations and one hundred or so individual workers from the sector, is currently developing a coalition model to support service providers working with women at risk of exploitation. According to its proponents, the platform could begin to address the duplication and lack of coordination observed among service providers.

One service provider remarked: "There still is a lot of competition among agencies and some old school mentality. However, support for interagency collaboration is apparently growing". Someone suggested that there now is a new generation of workers who are used to social media and happy to share information. They see the idea of a coalition to share information as a chance to develop more effective approaches. One service provider observed that: "We are learning how to play nice. There is perhaps a sort of new level of maturity within the sector." Moreover, there seems to be a lot of change and innovation taking place within that sector and "a need to learn from each other". Another respondent stated: "I strongly recommended the creation of an inter-agency coalition in the region. The goal would be to help victims and to help building community resiliency against human trafficking."

Other service provider said "(w)e all need to get out of our respective silos", while another one commented:

> "So far, many pilot programs have been funded, but that has not yet been consolidated. We are still writing the book on how to manage these programs. No one has the definitive case management model for this type of clients. I would like to create a model for more effective interventions."

Opinions varied with respect to the extent to which social service agencies cooperate with each other to support human trafficking victims. Some agencies reported great interagency collaboration at the local level even though service providers are not adequately resourced or otherwise staffed and structured to deal with victims with the timeliness and intensity of victimization demands. It was usually agreed that not much should be expected to change until service providers are better resourced and able to operate beyond 9-to-5 weekdays. In smaller communities, agencies typically reported that interagency collaboration tended to be very good despite the challenges encountered in sharing confidential information about their clients.

In Alberta, the question of interagency cooperation was not specifically mentioned in response to our survey. However, the issue has been earmarked by other experts who have examined the status of human trafficking service provider programs and observed a general lack of cooperation between and among the various providers.

Victims Contacts with the Police and the Justice System

Most agencies offering services to human trafficking survivors are open to helping them during their contacts with the police and the justice system and when relevant, their contacts with immigration authorities. However, few human trafficking victims report their victimization to the police. As one of the service providers noted "they (the survivors) are programmed to fear police, so yes this continues to be an issue." Another service provider wrote "trust is a big factor. Feeling like no one will believe them when

they tell their story, feeling uneasy about reporting to police…". Additionally, although many service providers work to emancipate victims from exploitative situations, law enforcement cannot effectively investigate and charge exploiters and traffickers when the incidents are not reported.

Service providers were asked to estimate the percentage of their clients who were survivors and who had reported their victimization to law enforcement authorities. The estimates usually ranged from 5% to 15% of sex trafficking survivors, and even lower for victims of labour trafficking. Some of the estimates offered, usually by transition houses or sexual assault centres, did not distinguish between sex trafficking survivors and survivors of other forms of violence and sexual exploitation and therefore quoted a higher percentage of victims who reported their victimization to the police.

Empowering Survivors

Improving access to assistance involves empowering survivors. In developing programs and policies, it is important to include the recommendations and advice from people with lived experience as they have direct knowledge of how particular programs and policies will impact them. Including survivor's perspectives helps to ensure that comprehensive strategies address the complex needs of survivors to help them on their road to full recovery (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018).

Funding

In both provinces, most organizations identified funding (or consistent funding) and program capacity as a very significant challenge in providing timely, coordinated, and comprehensive support to victims of sexual and labour exploitation and trafficking. Many existing programs benefit from time-limited funding, primarily as pilot projects. One service provider noted: "When there was money available for arts programs, a couple of years ago, we focused on that and developed an art-based program for victims. The next year it was about employment, we developed something for that." Another service provider expressed frustration that funding comes in the form of research and demonstration projects but that little is done in fact with the evidence and information thus collected. There is no sector-wide habit of sharing or discussing evaluation reports and findings to identify best practices. It was noted that it is difficult to obtain access to program evaluation reports; there is no central place to consult them. As a result, as Krieger and colleagues (2022) observed that the human trafficking assistance sector still lacks a proper program theory and delivery standards.

Advocacy & Focus on Prevention

Several service providers reported their discouragement about the lack of effective programs and interventions to address the risk factors that place a person, especially

young persons, at risk of becoming a victim in the first instance. There was a consensus among the service providers consulted that more prevention is necessary:

> "More public education is needed, and more importantly, a greater focus on prevention is needed. However, public awareness campaigns do not always seem to have the expected impact."

> "The underlying problems are poverty, the lack of safe drug supply, and the lack of services, especially housing and transportation, for persons in need in the first instance. Because these needs are not being met, individuals become persons at risk. Fix these problems and the risk of individuals becoming victims of human trafficking will be dramatically reduced. In short, think prevention."

Conclusion

Although there are a significant number of services for victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and human trafficking in both BC and Alberta, it is clear from the feedback provided by stakeholders in this study that more can be done to streamline service provision across the entire continuum of care. Service providers lamented that there is a significant and ever-widening gap in their ability to fully meet the unique and complex needs of human trafficking victims due to a perpetual lack of adequate funding and resources. The trauma inflicted upon victims of human trafficking before, during, and after their exploitation requires years of specialized recovery support. However, stakeholders pointed out that most programs and initiatives lack the funding to provide service long enough for most victims to heal. This lack of funding, coupled with barriers in the form of program eligibility and lengthy waitlists, continues to frustrate service providers who work to meet the needs of victims and survivors of human trafficking.

Survivors who participated in this study echoed similar sentiments and pointed out that victims face additional challenges once they engage with services. Several survivors stated that, more often than not, they did not truly feel 'heard' by professionals trying to assist and therefore, many of the services and supports available to survivors appear to be prescriptive rather than victim-centred or victim-led. The findings suggest a lack of specialized training on trauma and stigma informed and victim-centred approaches across the range of service providers. Participants in the study also pointed to a lack of collaboration among service providers as a barrier to developing a continuum of care that has streamlined referral pathways. They also identified pervasive difficulties in building effective relationships between service providers and law enforcement.

Overall, this study reiterates what several other similar studies have concluded: governments, advocacy groups, and community agencies need to work collaboratively to close ongoing gaps in service provision, share resources to increase capacity across all sectors, further develop and implement trauma-informed and survivor-informed service approaches among client-facing workers, and work towards the shared vision of helping victims and survivors of human trafficking lead healthy lives free from exploitation.

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APPENDIX A

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Assistance and Support Services for Survivors of Human Trafficking

Service Provider Questionnaire

The International Centre for Criminal Law Reform (ICCLR), a United Nations-affiliated research institute, is studying the assistance and support services available to survivors of exploitation and/or human trafficking in British Columbia and Alberta. The study is supported by a grant from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General of British Columbia. The study will map out existing services in these two provinces and identify the types of services and supports that are (most) needed by survivors of labour and sex trafficking, as well as gaps in services. One component of the study consists of a survey of existing service providers.

Based on our initial search, we understand that your organization may help and support survivors of labour and/or sex trafficking and/or sexual exploitation. We hope that we can count on your assistance to present a complete picture of the services available to victims and that you will agree to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. If possible, please return the survey by July 30, 2022.We are most grateful for your cooperation. The questionnaire will only take 15-20 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions concerning this project, feel free to contact us at: yvon.dandurand@ufv.ca (Yvon Dandurand), or in Alberta: jwinterdyk@mtroyal.ca (Professor John Winterdyk).

Please return the completed questionnaire to jwinterdyk@mtroyal.ca

1. Name of your organization:
2. Address:
3. Name of a specific program (if applicable):
4. Name of contact person:
5. Email address of contact person:
6. Where are your services offered? Please check the applicable response, or answer "Other":
   _____Alberta
   _____British Columbia
   _____Both
   Other: _____

7. Can you first tell us what best describes the work of your organization? Please check all that apply.

_____Providing broad based/comprehensive community services
_____Providing broad based/comprehensive victim services
_____Providing broad based/comprehensive specialized victim services
_____Providing assistance to victims and survivors of human trafficking
_____Other (please specify): _____

8. One of the things we are looking at in our study is just what services are available to victims and survivors of exploitation and/or human trafficking (i.e., sex trafficking and/or labour trafficking). Are you able you tell us what kinds of services are provided by your organization and whether each service is provided directly, or indirectly by arranging to have the services provided by another organization (using the options below, or by providing more information in the section provided "Other")? Please check ALL that might apply.

Type of Services	Check if provided Directly	Check if only provided Indirectly
Translation services		
Physical protection/access to safety		
Emergency financial assistance		
Assistance with regularizing the victim's immigration status		
Employment assistance		
Access to government services		
Access to compensation/restitution (e.g., unpaid wages)		
Lodging (including emergency shelter)		
Psycho-social support/counselling		
Access to medical and mental health care		
Relocation – repatriation – transportation		
Facilitating communication with family and relatives		
Legal information (including immigration, labour law)		
Legal assistance and representation		
Safety Planning		
Support during police investigation and court proceedings		
Unsure or other (please specify):		

9. What is the primary source of funding for the services you offer to survivors of sexual exploitation and/or forced labour trafficking?

_____

10. How do the victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and/or forced labour trafficking you serve come to your attention? Again, please check ALL that apply.

_____Self-referral by victim/survivor
_____Referred by family member
_____Referred by friend
_____Referred by another agency
_____Referred by police
Other (please specify):

10. How many ***new*** victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and/or forced labour trafficking do you assist every year?

11. What is the primary geographic reach of your organization? Please check all that apply:
_____Local
_____Regional
_____National
_____International

12. Approximately what percentage of victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and/or forced labour trafficking that you assist belong to the following groups? Please answer with an approximate percentage, DK if you don't know, or NA if not applicable:
_____Women
_____Children/Youth (under 18 years old)
_____Men
_____Aboriginal
_____Another ethnic minority
_____LGBTQ2S+
_____Foreign national
_____Immigrant / Refugee

13. In what ways have the survivors you assist been victimized? Please check ALL that apply.
_____Use of deception
_____Threats
_____Violence
_____Sexual exploitation
_____ Labour exploitation
_____ Financial exploitation
Other (please specify):

14. What percentage of the survivors of sexual exploitation and/or forced labour trafficking whom you assisted during the last year reported their victimization to the police?
%_____ (this can be an estimate)

15. How does your organization assess the needs of the victims that it assists? Please check all that apply.
_____Basic intake form
_____Assessment checklist screening at intake
_____Follow-up checklist assessments
_____Exit interview/assessment
_____Post exit follow-up assessment
_____ Other (please specify): _____

16. Do the victims have to meet any specific eligibility (e.g., age, gender, situational factors, etc.) criteria to qualify for the services offered by your organization?
_____No
_____Yes (please answer 16b)

16b. (If YES please specify)

17. Is there a process within your organization for program evaluation?
_____Yes (if answered Yes, please move to question 17b)
_____No (if answered No, please move to question 18a)

17b. Was your program evaluated internally or externally?
____ internally
____ externally

18a. To what extent do you feel the services provided by your organization are a good fit for the needs of the victims/survivors of sexual exploitation and/or forced labour trafficking? Please check the response that best describes the fit.
_____A very good fit
_____A good fit
_____ Somewhat of a fit
_____ Other organizations would be a better fit (please proceed to question 18b)

18b. If you answered, "other organizations would be a better fit", briefly clarify your answer.

19. What would you say are the most significant challenges your organization encounters in terms of providing services to victims/survivors of sexual exploitation and/or forced labour trafficking? Please list your top THREE challenges.

20. What barriers may exist which could prevent victims/survivors from finding and/or utilizing your services?

21. Is there anything you might like to add about the work that you do and concerning the purpose of this project that you might like to share with us?

22. Do you have any suggestions as to how we might contact victims/survivors of sexual exploitation and/or forced labour trafficking in Alberta or British Columbia for the study? ***Would you, for example, be willing to facilitate such contacts?*** Please specify.

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APPENDIX B

Qualitative Review of Services for Survivors of Human Trafficking
Themes for Follow-up Interviews with Service Providers

Dimension 1 – *The Organization*

Is there anything in the respondent's answer to our initial questionnaire that requires clarification or elaboration?

In particular, whether the organization has released official reports, conducted a program evaluation or has any other materials on the services they offer or on the needs of the victims.

Dimension 2 – *The services offered*?

- How does the organization reach out to victims (e.g., outreach activities, referral from which other organizations, etc.)?
- Who is eligible for the services offered by your organization?
- Are there plans to expand the services currently offered by your organization? (probe a little - what, how, when, why)
- Are you aware of whether victims are reporting their victimization to the police? If so, any ideas of what percentage of such victims? Is difficult for victims to do so? Why?

Dimension 3: *The Survivors/Victims' Needs and the Kind of Assistance they Require*

- Do you have any information you can share with us on how the victims you serve were victimized (e.g., type of exploitation, use of violence and threats, use of deception).
- How does the organization assess the needs of victims/survivors? (i.e., intake, assessment, screening tool, checklist or other instruments used)
- How are/might the needs of victims of sex trafficking and labour trafficking different. If they are different, how so? What, if any, are the similarities?
- Are the services provided by your organization adapted to the needs of the victims/survivors? How so?

- Have you or your organization identified gaps in the services available to victims of human trafficking? Can you please specify?

- Do you think that there are barriers to access to these services by victims of human trafficking? Please briefly explain your response.

Dimension 4 – *Assistance Offered & Service Delivery*

- In your view, are the victims/survivors who benefit from the services offered by your organization/program satisfied with the assistance they receive? (What do they appreciate they most? Why are they not satisfied?)
- Can you tell me about the kind of interagency collaboration your organization is involved in to help and support the victims? (E.g., collaboration with law enforcement, health and mental health services, etc.).
- Are there issues with this kind of collaboration? (What are the issues? How could they be addressed?) (Are there local coordination mechanisms?)
- What do you think needs to happen in this province to make sure that victims/survivors of human trafficking receive the help and support they need?

Snowballing

- Might you be able to provide us with suggestions/recommendations about other people/organizations that we should consider contacting for the study?
- Might you have any suggestions about how to contact victims/survivors for the purpose of the study? Would you be willing to help to facilitate as we would….

Conclusion and Final Remarks

- Is there anything you would like to share with me about how to improve services for victims of human trafficking in this province and in this country?
- Do you have any questions for me?
- The results of the study will be made available on the ICCLR website and we will notify you as soon as they as posted there.

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APPENDIX C

STRUCTURE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH VICTIMS / SURVIVORS

Informed Consent (at the time of beginning the interview)

(1) Thank participant for agreeing to participate in the interview and confirm that he/she has qualified for the stipend (Amazon Gift Card)

(2) Remind participant of the purpose of the study: To better understand how to support and provide assistance to survivors of human trafficking and contribute to improving existing services.

(3) Remind participant of the purpose of the interview: We would like you to tell us about your experience of seeking help and support, whether and how you sought assistance, and what kind of assistance you received.

(4) Confirm that everything that the participant shares during the interview will be confidential and that that nothing that he/she says will be attributed to him/her.

(5) Explain that the interview is not being recorded and that notes are being taken which will not include any identifying information.

(6) Explain that the participant can decide to stop the interview at any moment and can decline to answer any question she/he is not comfortable with.

Basic information

- Age
- Gender
- Immigration/citizenship status
- Place of residence (general)

Questions about victimization

Do you see yourself as a victim/survivor of human trafficking? Briefly explain.

You may not be comfortable sharing the details of your exploitation by human traffickers, but if you don't mind can you help me understand how you became a victim and how you were exploited?

- Sub-areas of interest: whether it was labour or sexual exploitation; how and where the recruitment took place (especially if it took place outside the country); where the exploitation took place – in BC or elsewhere in Canada; when did the person realize he/she was being trafficked)

Did you report your situation to the police or any other organization or authority (e.g., Canadian border security agency)?

- If yes: When? Where? Did someone else report it to the police? What happened after the matter was reported to the police? Have the criminals been arrested/ charged/ convicted? Did you have to testify in court?

Do you feel safe now? Can you briefly share with me what this means to you? I know that safety does not necessarily mean the same thing to everyone because of our different life journey?

Questions about assistance required?

Did you feel you needed help/support? If so, what kind of help/support? Do you still need help/support?

Who did you reach out to for assistance? (Was it difficult to access services? Why? What, if any, were the difficulties you encounter in getting help?)

Questions about assistance and support received

Was someone able to provide assistance?

- If yes: Who/what agency? How did they help? What kind of assistance did they provide?

What kind of help and support were you able to access?

Did you get all the help you needed? What was missing?

What are your plans now?

When applicable in case of transnational exploitation: Are you planning to return to your country? When? Is someone helping you to do so?

What do you think people need to know when they are trying to help and support victims of trafficking?

Finally, do you have any suggestions about how to make it safer for victim-survivors to come forward and seek assistance?