TRANSITIONS AND FLUIDITY:

Exploring Women's Agency in the Sex Industry

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NORAHT
Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking

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GLASS IMAGE

Images by Brenda Quenneville

The image of one of Brenda's potted bowls is fused glass encased in pottery. It was chosen to represent not only the complexities associated with human trafficking, but highlights the possibility of transformation and resilience. In this pottery technique, coloured pieces of broken glass are layered on the bottom of a thick walled clay form. When the glass goes through the kiln within the pottery, the glass melts, fusing together in beautiful swirls of colour and texture resembling crystals. There is no absolute control in this process, it is up to the materials to transform and choose to revitalize. The resulting glass is stronger than it was before, as this new shape embedded in pottery asserts its identity. Through resiliency it is able to maintain its core purpose and integrity even in the face of dramatically changed pressures and circumstances.

WAVES IMAGE

The image of the waves is another piece of Brenda's pottery, this time a plate. The imprint of the waves are rolled onto a flattened piece of clay. The clay is then stretched to size and placed on a mould to shape it as it dries. The imprint is very delicate, and can be flattened easily. However, once it goes through the firing process, and glaze is added, the subtleties of the transformation emerge. When Brenda works with this motif, she often thinks how "Happiness comes in waves."

••• TRIGGER WARNING •••

This report contains graphic references to topics such as sexual violence and abuse, physical violence, and systemic disenfranchisement. This may cause readers emotional upset or trauma.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our gratitude and appreciation to Michelle, Leona Skye, Jenny, and Deb, who generously shared their stories with us and helped us write this report. We also thank Tracy Gregory for her insight and assistance on this report.

We acknowledge the Anishinabek peoples on whose territory we live under the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850. We are grateful to be able to live and learn on these lands with all our relations.

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INTRODUCTION

Who is NORAHT?

NORAHT is a research partnership between Nipissing University, the Union of Ontario Indians: Anishinabek Nation, Victim Services of Nipissing District, and Centered Fire Counselling and Consulting. Past partners are the AIDS Committee of North Bay and Area and Amelia Rising Sexual Assault Centre of Nipissing. Over the past seven years, we have engaged in feminist and decolonial participatory action research in order to identify gaps and barriers to service provision for women in the sex industry within our region.

Scope of Project

Although men, boys, girls, transgender and two-spirit persons are involved in the sex industry, our focus is on women. While all these groups will have some things in common, specific analysis of their complex and different experiences and needs is beyond our scope.

Research Questions

- Who and what does the anti-human trafficking framework exclude?
- How do women experience and navigate violence in the sex industry?
- What can we learn from their input and experiences about the delivery of services and supports?

Research Data Sources

- Literature review;
- The 8 PAR workshops and three follow-up conferences with service providers and experiential persons that we hosted in 2017-2018;
- Research interviews with women with lived experience (small qualitative study; not generalizable but we believe it is illustrative of a broad range of experiences);
- Public talks by persons involved in sex industry (trafficking survivors, sex workers);
- Conferences and workshops organized by the Sex Workers Advisory Network of Sudbury (SWANS).

Key Objectives in this Report

1. To challenge and problematize predominant images and narratives of human trafficking that we see online and in policy (i.e., the girl in chains);
2. To shift the discourse from anti-trafficking narratives to anti-violence work for all persons involved in the sex industry;
3. To rethink our conceptions of time and progress by turning to Indigenous non-linear views of time in order to highlight transitions and fluidity of experience as women navigate difficult complex situations;
4. To theorize and illustrate the agency and resistance that exists in even the most coercive situations in order to draw out the ways in which service provision must center on self-determination, not victimization;
5. To demonstrate the importance and centrality of lived experience by drawing as much as possible from what our research participants and other experiential persons have said.

Clarifying our Terms: From Anti-trafficking to Anti-Violence

Words matter and context counts. It is important to recognize that terminology may have different interpretations and implications when used by those with lived experience as compared to laypersons (by "layperson," we mean anybody *without* lived experience). For example, women in the sex industry might refer to themselves

as "girls" (as in "working girls") but this term is infantilizing when used by a service provider or anyone else outside the sex industry (Stella, 2013). Furthermore, when terms like "human trafficking" are used in an all-encompassing manner, this does not and cannot capture the complexity of diverse experiences. Indeed, experiential women who do not see themselves reflected in human trafficking narratives may not see that they too have a right to demand protection, safety, and dignity. Anti-trafficking discourse and policy create a hierarchy of violence rather than working to address violence in the lives of all women in the sex industry.

Our objective is to move away from anti-trafficking discourse toward an anti-violence framework that is inclusive all persons in the sex industry. Thus, we insist on the more inclusive terminology of violence, exploitation and abuse in the sex industry, which includes:

- Labour exploitation (e.g., third party takes an inordinate percentage);
- Sexual or physical assault;
- Theft (e.g., client doesn't pay);
- Domestic or intimate partner violence;
- Surveillance and harassment;
- Arbitrary arrest;
- Unsafe working conditions;
- Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

We are uncomfortable with the term "human trafficking" because of the troubling and inadequate ways that it is used in anti-trafficking discourse. Yet, we also recognize that the language of human trafficking is an ingrained part of the legal and policy framework in which service providers operate. According to the RCMP, human trafficking "involves recruiting, transporting, transferring, receiving, holding, concealing, harbouring, or exercising control, direction or influence over that person, for the purpose of exploitation, generally for sexual exploitation or forced labour." While we recognize that this is the operational definition of human trafficking in Canada, it is nonetheless deeply problematic because the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCPEA) states that all prostitution is "inherently exploitive." This language—and the law itself—facilitates the conflation of sex work and human trafficking (Roots 2013).

In contrast, we understand human trafficking to be distinct from sex work and distinct from migrant sex work.

- Sex work is a chosen form of labour;
- Sex industry refers to anyone involved in the selling or trading of sex, including those who might not identify as "workers."

In this report, we seek to honour our participants by respecting that there are different ways of interpreting and speaking about experiences. We have not edited their stories, except where clarity was needed, and this was done with their ongoing consent and participation.

BACKGROUND: THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING PROBLEM

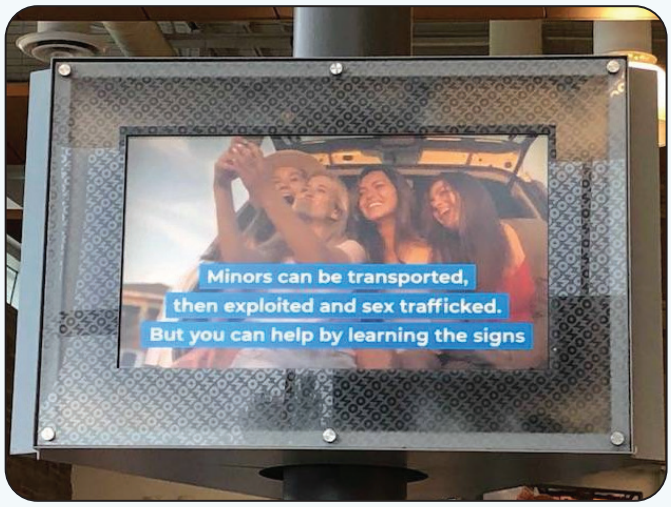
There is much international and Canadian research documenting the harmful effects of sensationalized anti-sex trafficking awareness campaigns and media depictions (Lam and Leppe 2019, Rodríguez-López 2018, de Shalit and Van der Meulen 2015/2016, Baker 2013). We are referring to images of women and girls bound in chains, or marked with barcodes, sitting hopelessly in dark corners, etc. You know these kinds of images - try doing a quick google image search. These images are part of the public "common sense" on human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

While these types of imagery and ideas may capture some women's experiences, they are deeply problematic for a number of reasons:

- They depict women as passive, helpless victims awaiting rescue. This positions well-meaning outsiders as their only hope and ignores the agency, resistance and resilience of the women themselves.
- They fail to capture the complexity of violence, exploitation and abuse in the sex industry: many trafficking situations are far more nuanced than kidnapping or brutal coercion.
- These images are accompanied by "rescue" narratives and strategies that treat trafficked women as helpless, innocent, naïve, and entirely powerless. Rescue narratives assume that women should want to exit the sex industry entirely, rather than just wanting to exit an abusive situation. We note that the language of rescue is now being replaced with the language of "exit."
- These images are often highly racialized, depicting mainly white girls and white women as innocent victims. This supports the heavily documented truth that Black, Indigenous and other racialized and/or immigrant women and girls are oversexualized in the public eye and not afforded access to the identity of innocence or "victim" (Maynard 2018, NSWP 2015, Boyer and Kampouris 2014). At the same time, gendered, racialized and classed constructions of pimps and traffickers serve to stereotype and profile Black and other racialized men as dangerous and criminal (see Law 2020; Millar and O'Doherty 2020). However, as experiential research participant Michelle pointed out, all races are involved as traffickers and their targets can be rich, poor, educated and any race.
- In policy terms, "rescue" or "exit" campaigns can result in deportation of Asian migrant and immigrant sex workers, surveillance and harassment of voluntary sex workers, and individualized responses that focus on criminal justice/policing rather than the root causes of trafficking and other forms of violence in the sex industry (Kaye, Winterdyk, and Quarterman 2014).
- Rescue narratives have implications for Indigenous and racialized women in particular, and these populations are both over-policed and under-protected. There is great risk of replicating colonizing discourse about the need for white saviours, whereas the capacity for supporting women lies in the self-determination of Indigenous and racialized communities.
- Deb, one of the experiential women who shared her story with us, notes that images and narratives that depict women being taken, stolen, or captured fail to address women who entered the sex industry by choice including hope of a relationship, financial gain, or due to the verbal and emotional manipulation used by others involved in human trafficking.

Positive Imagery

This anti-human trafficking campaign at ONRoute stops along the 401 corridor is a positive example of how to raise awareness. It does not



For more information, see the Courage for Freedom website. For 2020, the campaign will go national, re-branded as Project Maple Leaf. (Note: NORAHT has no affiliation with Courage for Freedom).

sensationalize, and it shows this diverse group of young women as active, self-determining people.

> *There is a spectrum from sex worker to trafficking and women are fluid along the spectrum.*
>
> *(Service provider workshop participant)*

FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS: THE FLUIDITY OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

There is a broad range of experiences in the sex industry and women transition in and out of different situations. In contrast to the standard anti-trafficking "entry-to-exit" narrative that encourages "exit" as the ultimate objective for women in the sex industry, we frame our analysis in terms of the fluidity of women's experiences, as captured in the quote above.

In this section, we turn to Indigenous conceptions of time in order to challenge Eurocentric constructions of progress and to better understand how women navigate complex situations. We also turn to the concept of tactical agency to emphasize that even in the most coercive situations, people retain a capacity to act and resist. This analytical framework centers on self-determination and empowerment, both of which are key to the effective and socially just delivery of services.

Rethinking our Conceptions of Progress and Time

NORAHT has a strong commitment to decolonizing research. Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people are overrepresented in the sex industry as whole, particularly street level work (NIMMIWG 2019, 656) and as victims of human trafficking (RCMP 2013). However, the conflation of sex work and human trafficking has problematic implications for Indigenous self-determination:

The idea that women should progress from time of "entry" toward "exit" is a reflection of Eurocentric, linear conceptions of time and civilization. "Rescue" narratives within the anti-trafficking movement mirror historic colonial ideas about "saving" and "civilizing" Indigenous peoples through residential schools and other policies. In particular, historic moralizing of the connection between racial and sexual purity served to position Indigenous, Black and other racialized women as promiscuous, wildly fertile, and always sexually available (Maynard 2018, NSWP 2015, Boyer and Kampouris 2014).

Eurocentric time positions Indigenous, African and other racialized peoples as "outside of time" – they are seen as primitive and uncivilized in

> *Turning all [Indigenous] sex workers into trafficked victims does nothing for their individual sovereignty over their bodies and freedom of movement, nor does it open up more options to them. Aren't all Indigenous women, then, fated to be sexually exploited? Trafficking discourse allows for the representation of only one type of "victim" – one who wants to be "saved" and would never "choose" to engage in sex work. The implication is that sister, mother, daughter, auntie – these are women worth [saving]. Sex worker, stripper, drug addict, drop-out, runaway – these women are seen as less worthy of saving because they might be implicated in their own abuse. This is an extension of disallowing the legitimization of sex workers' needs, perspectives, and engagements in creating safer communities.*
>
> *– Indigenous sex work advocate and scholar, Sarah Hunt (2015/16, p.30)*

comparison to modern and civilized people of European descent (Rifkin 2017). Eurocentric timelines involve the "march of progress" through, for example, colonial expansion, unsustainable economic growth, and technological development.

To date, Eurocentric conceptions of state design have served only the settlers. Indigenous people should not have to rely on state responses that are founded in concepts of racism, exploitation and genocide (rooted in mass marginalization of Indigenous peoples and the land). Typically, justice isn't served for Indigenous peoples, many missing and murdered Indigenous people aren't found, and a larger number of their cases are not solved. Indigenous peoples do not enjoy the same basic rights as other Canadians, yet there is little public outcry or support. Over hundreds of years of colonization, which is ongoing, social systems and state policies are not working for ALL of society. This is why Indigenous peoples have to fight so hard to remind everyone that their lives are important. Despite talk of "reconciliation," Indigenous peoples continually bear the burden of convincing settler Canadians that they too are valuable people.

We challenge this Eurocentric, linear view of time and progress. Indigenous temporality focuses on the cyclical nature of time, such as the cycle of the seasons or animals' patterns of migration. Or, for example, the Indigenous saying "all my relations" speaks to how the past underlies the present: the ancestors, both human and non-human, are in the present, in dreamtime, and in decision-making that safeguards the next seven generations. There is also the Anishinabee belief and teaching of "Mino-Bimaadiziwin" or Living a Good Life. Anishinabe people believe in setting intentions in everything we do for the past, present and future seven generations.

Linear conceptions of time position "exit" as progress or success, and when women do not exit the sex industry, this may be construed as "failure" on the part of support services and government policy. Perceptions from within the sex industry of success or progress may differ significantly.

For example, some forced sex workers escape human trafficking and become escorts, exotic dancers, or receptionists in clubs. As Leona Skye notes, this is a step up and a movement in a good direction. There is a "fine but completely visible line" between street work and indoor sex work, she says. Moving indoors is a "safe transition" where you can make more money and provide consent. That said, Michelle recalls that when she worked as an escort for a woman, she was safe but Michelle felt "pimped out" because this woman took 40% of her earnings.

> *"[E]ven within the most violent and coercive of situations, there [is] a sufficient degree of agency and autonomy to ensure survival and self-preservation."*
>
> *– formerly trafficked sex worker, scholar and activist, Claudia Cojacaru (2016)*

Tactical Agency

The metaphor of a circle or spiral allows us to move beyond simplistic binaries such as choice/coercion, voluntary/forced, whore/victim, failure/success. Moving beyond binary thinking helps us to see the complexities of lived experience, the role of individual circumstance and structural factors, and the ways that women navigate difficult situations.

Agency refers to the capacity to act, in contrast to being *acted upon*. The concept of "tactical agency," which was developed in the context of research on child soldiers, is useful for understanding how people cope with the immediate conditions of their lives. We emphasize the capacity to act and to make choices within the context of one's situation. This is important because resiliency and the right to self-determination must be respected in the delivery of services.

Leona Skye expands on the quote below: "We don't want to do it, but we do it anyway to survive. It's a war we are fighting; we need to survive. Do what you have to do. It's tactical, it's practical."

Largely reactive, tactical agency is exercised when people seize opportunities, mobilise resources, and instrumentally adapt multiple identities – even though they are acting within constraints and from positions of weakness and subordination. Tactical agency is different from strategic agency, where people operate from positions of power to shape outcomes.

(Honwana 2009).

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES THROUGH TIME

We invite you to imagine women in the sex industry as moving through time in terms of a spiral motion – captured in Figure 1 - of different strands of beads twisted together. As noted previously, rather than expecting women's experiences in the sex industry to be a linear progression from entry to exit, we want to think about fluidity and transitions in keeping with the Indigenous conception of time as circular or spiral-like.

The direction of people's journeys may shift (e.g., from abusive situations to sex work or from sex work to abusive situations) or they may come back to familiar places in their journeys (i.e. multiple efforts to leave or to detoxify or stop use) as they interact with different structural factors and specific circumstances.

We turn now to the stories and knowledges of Jenny, Deb, Michelle and Leona Skye to illustrate and analyze how women experience and navigate the sex industry through the exercise of tactical agency.

Entry

Women enter the sex industry for many different reasons. While brutally violent coercion certainly occurs, situations of entry are more often quite nuanced. Rather than constructing all women in the sex industry as passive, witless victims, it is important to acknowledge the role of self-determination and tactical agency in their choices.

Consider Jenny's story of entry into the sex trade. Here we see circumstances that are less than ideal. But we also see Jenny's desire for independence, self-sufficiency, and a better life:

After running away from an abusive home to Toronto, Jenny "lived in stairwells, sidewalks and couches if people let me. That wasn't helping me much, I needed more than that to live. I was living off of people, not being able to give back to them. I wanted to be on myself, I felt obligated. So, I started in sex work, I don't know how it happened. A guy picked me up one day, and he offered me money and I just went for it. After what I went through it seemed easy."

Deb, who spent years in the sex industry and is now a service provider, spoke to us about the nuances of entry. What Deb captures here is more complicated than media trafficking myths about "brainwashing":

"[Charisma] is the biggest lure that I am worried women are not going to pick up on. They are going to think the signs [of trafficking] are black eyes and abduction -

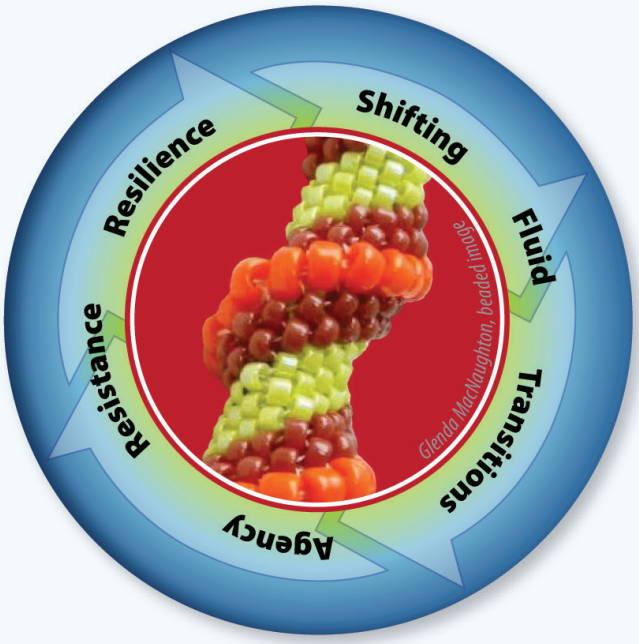


Figure 1: Women's Experiences Through Time

and it is not. That is why you can't get out of it. ***You go into it so willingly so you feel like you chose that. And you did to a certain extent but not for the same reasons that people think***. It is to impress the man, especially at that age. If you haven't had a boyfriend by the time you are sixteen and seventeen you are so susceptible to that thing." [emphasis added].

Consider also how Deb explains her own entry. This is her choice, although Deb also recognized at the time that she was being used:

"My friend and I had an apartment very young, and we would party after hours a lot. We grew up with some of [the guys we partied with in Sudbury]...Then we decided to move to Toronto. We started dancing, making money. We met up with the guys there. The lifestyle continued, and they saw a goldmine there but they often didn't like the stripping. This took us out of town for three weeks out of the month. Our money was spent by the time we got back to Toronto."

Michelle told us about her daughter, Cheyenne, who, tragically, is now one of the thousands of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGTBQQIA persons in Canada:

Cheyenne was only 16 when she had her baby, she then moved in with her son's father on reserve. She was a good mom and loved her son so much. I had started noticing that she had these men that were friending her on Facebook and when I asked who they were she would tell me that they were from Toronto and that they were just friends. I was kind of worried for her as these men were known to disrespect women. I told her about my life when I was on the streets hoping that she would not end up like me.

When Cheyenne was about 18 years old she left her baby with the father and went to the City of Toronto to find herself. But I believe that she was lured by the men on her Facebook. While in Toronto she was staying at a young Native women's shelter where I believe she was recruited by another Native girl. Cheyenne was naïve and never really lived in the big city. She was not street smart.

I started to notice pictures that she was posting of her getting her nails done and hair along with clothes and pretty things. I knew she had no job and no financial means. I saw pictures of her partying with the girl who recruited her and some men who were East Indian. I had asked her if she was "working" but she got defensive and told me, no, and that she was not like me. I just told her that these men will make her pay one way or another. I knew in my heart that she was "working."

In these situations, we see the inadequacy of simplistic binaries such as choice/coercion and voluntary/forced. Life is messier and more complex than these binaries suggest.

Transitions

Because we see women's journeys as a spiral rather than linear temporal process, we use the non-judgmental term "transition" to explain movement through time.

Deb's journey involves multiple transitions through situations involving choice, circumstance and coercion (Figure 2). Recall from above Deb's

Figure 2: Transitions, Deb

voluntary entry into dancing, although she recognized that she and her friend were being used by their boyfriends. The boyfriends put increasing pressure on the two women to stop travelling up north to strip and to start selling sex in Toronto. Despite increasing pressure, Deb and her friend were able to leave their boyfriends and "went fully into stripping" on their own terms. However, when lap dancing became legalized, their situation changed. Deb explains:

"Basically if you were a clean dancer who didn't have sex for money, now you had to. It was a put out or get out thing. It changed everything. It took the choice away from the dancers. You either started over and worked at Tim Hortons for minimum wage or you went all the way in the clubs. Then all the bars started changing. They got separate rooms with locked doors." Many dancers felt the pressure to engage in sex acts at that time who wouldn't have prior to the new laws. You have little or no education, a lot of times you lived in hotel rooms provided by the clubs so getting a "normal job" seemed impossible."

After that, as Deb recalls:

"Then I engaged in prostitution. I began using hard drugs to cope."

Realizing it wasn't for her, Deb pulled herself out of addiction after about three months: she credits having support from her family, a good social network, and her own apartment.

"Because I had those things in place, it pulled me back. If you have a family and know you can clean up if you want, it helps. For some girls they don't have that, they are on their own."

Deb eventually met her husband at the strip club and together they left "the game," as she says, to become, "normal" in a "nice little middle-class town." Deb assures us that this isn't often the case, however.

"Most men do not provide the support for women to exit if they choose. And most men who choose to date you are not the type of man to be able provide much security financial or otherwise that would assist you in leaving, I mean what type of man really wants to marry a dancer?"

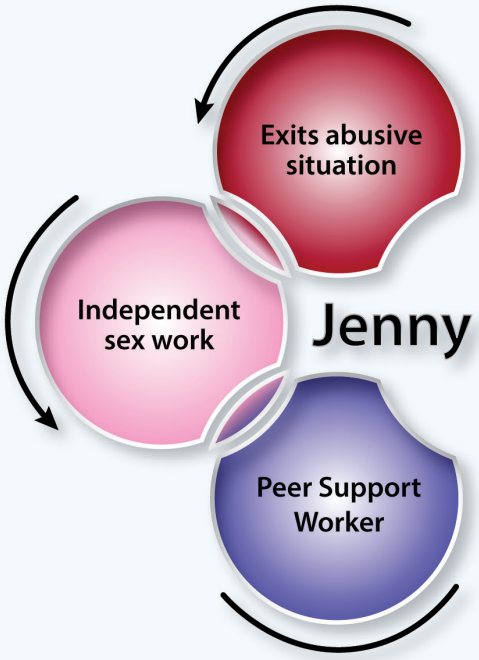


Figure 3: Transitions, Jenny

As noted in Figure 3, Jenny started in sex work as a way of supporting herself. She met an older man who acted like her boyfriend. It was an abusive relationship that she now identifies as trafficking. She ended up meeting another man, who removed her from the situation altogether. She states,

"After all that trauma, this man was a ray of sunshine... He wanted a companion, so he took me out to British Columbia, and he took care of me for a long time."

Five years later, he was arrested for drug trafficking. Jenny was left in British Columbia alone and started stripping as a way to support herself. She has since danced all across Canada.

Jenny returned to selling sex, though she remained her own manager. From time to time she would work with an escort service, but only if she felt

that she was in charge of her own goals and not being exploited by the escort service. A turning point for Jenny was when she contracted HIV. She had never accessed services before, but realized she needed to eat better and she wasn't doing well financially. An outreach program welcomed her to access their health services. "They saw something in me, some intelligence in me and a drive to want to support people."

Deep down, Jenny felt this had always been her calling. Through a series of leadership training and professional development opportunities offered through the outreach program, she has moved from accessing services to providing services to peers in her community. Jenny says,

> "So, when I got together with the organization God said something. There is a higher power up there saying this is where you belong. This is why you have been put through all this trauma, to come out whole on the other end. To come out and support people who are going through the same things as you. I have learned from everything I have gone through, and I learned how to get out of it. And now I am trying to teach other people and support other people going through this."

FACTORS SHAPING JOURNEYS

Women's journeys and the choices they make are shaped by structures of violence and personal circumstances. Structures of violence include colonialism, racism, gendered violence, the criminalization and stigmatization of drug use and sex work, lack of affordable housing, and lack of harm reduction services. Structural violence creates systemic barriers to rights, dignity and resources, and it causes *preventable* harm to marginalized people in a society. Other factors shaping journeys are more specific to individual circumstances, like having circles of support (or not), being a mother, or substance use.

Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the factors that shaped the journeys of the four women who shared their stories with us.

Figure 4: Factors Shaping Journeys

Thinking of the different factors in the diagram, we focus on the journeys of Michelle and Leona Skye, two Anishinaabe women who spoke at conferences we organized.

As intergenerational survivors of the residential school system, both Leona Skye and Michelle recounted how sexual violence and abuse were normalized in their childhood. Their experiences with Child Protection Services and other youth institutions were highly problematic. Their experiences confirm the systemic racism, discrimination and bias against Indigenous and Black peoples within the child welfare system (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018):

At age 12, Michelle was first introduced to a pimp (by another girl) while living in a group home.

> "I was in group homes and always running away. I found that men knew that you were a runaway and would prey on that…When

I met him, he asked me if I wanted to make money too. I was on the run and had nowhere to go or had no money. That was when I first did my first trick. I thought to myself since men had already been molesting me why not make money for selling myself. Little did I know that the pimp was making a lot of money from me and my friend because we were baby prostitutes and men liked younger girls…I thought $20 was a lot of money at the time."

Leona ran away from home repeatedly to escape the abuse and was always brought back. She finally gained the courage to report her father's abuse and he was sentenced to two and a half years in prison (but only served 10 months). Leona became a crown ward but, as she says:

"I was treated like a perpetrator rather than the victim that I was." She recalls being placed in a psychiatric hospital, medicated, placed in a straightjacket, and blamed for putting her father in jail. Leona managed to run away to Toronto, briefly finding safety and community with a group of street children.

Although their stories are quite different, both Michelle and Leona were brutally and violently coerced into selling sex. Substance use played a role in both their lives as a means of coping and numbing the pain. Drugs also provide traffickers a means of control over the women they exploit. (*Indeed, Leona's trafficker forcibly initiated her use of drugs*). Leona and Michelle's traffickers used threats against their children as a mean of control. Michelle notes:

"I had gotten pregnant from my trafficker, not realizing that this was a way to keep me in the game. He would threaten to take my kids away and keep them away from me when I would be defiant towards him."

Both women eventually escaped their traffickers, but remained in the sex industry for some time afterwards.

We also saw intersectional links between motherhood, agency and self-determination. Michelle told us:

"During my pregnancy I didn't go to the doctors because I was either on drugs or beaten so I did not want them to flag my baby [for apprehension] when she was born. So, I had no prenatal care. I was lucky that my daughter was born healthy." Later on, however, after she had escaped her trafficker and was independently working the streets, Michelle made the tough decision to give her children away "so that they would have a better life that I could give them."

In this story, we see clear connections between structural violence and personal circumstances: Michelle's own experiences with CAS and the lack of First Nations control over its own child welfare are both factors in her decision to avoid prenatal care. Further, we see Michelle exercising control in the decision to give up her children, rather than a loss of control in having her children taken away. The children were placed with their great Aunt and Uncle.

Michelle further notes:

"When my daughter Cheyenne was about to give birth, a social worker told me and her father that Cheyenne was flagged because she was still in care and that she had a past of using drugs. They didn't know that Cheyenne was doing good and that she had the support of both parents. They were going to take the baby away if she tested positive for drugs. We told that social worker that she will not lay eyes on our grandchild and that they were never going to take away the baby. All she told us that she was just doing her job! I believe that because Cheyenne was only 16 and was Native that they just assumed that she could not take care of her baby. That Social Worker never laid eyes on my grandchild and Cheyenne tested negative for drugs."

Indigenous culture plays a tremendous role in Michelle's and Leona's journeys of healing and recovery, something also stressed by Indigenous service providers at our workshops.

One day, as Leona was walking her 13 month-old-son, a car pulled up in front of her. A man got out and beat Leona so severely that she was left for dead in a trash can. The man put her screaming son in the back of the car and drove away. The biker who had purchased Leona was behind the abduction, and gave her son to another family to raise as their own. Twenty years would pass before Leona would finally find him.

Following the brutal beating and abduction of her son, Leona found the strength to escape, permanently. Miraculously, she was able to start the healing process. She forgave her father in his final years and reconciled with her mother, both as a means of self-healing and to honour her Ojibway ancestors. Leona says, "I want one thousand times more for my children than I ever received, every parent wants that. I can't image what my parents had to go through to believe that I received a thousand times more than they did." Leona witnessed her father's passing on July 17, 2017. "I went to the sacred fire and told the creator that I had forgiven my father, and to be kind to him and take him quickly. My father died the next morning."

Now, at the age of 51, Leona is the proud mother of four adult children, a grandmother to three and is happily married. Leona has moved on to become an internationally recognized Indigenous artist and advocate for survivors of human trafficking.[1]

Michelle contemplated leaving her trafficker many times, but was afraid he would beat her and take away her children. Although he eventually went to prison, his men continued to control what she did on the streets. "I had begged them to let me go and since I was getting old they figured that I was no good for them. I had aged out for them: I was only 20. When I finally arrived in Thunder Bay, my sister had me go to detox for 10 days as I quit cold turkey from hard drugs. The Detox Centre made a referral to the Treatment Centre after I was done detoxing."

When Michelle went to treatment, she found her culture, and entered her first sweat lodge. She told us, "I didn't know anything about my culture and when I started to find out who I was, I was excited and absorbed all the teachings that I could and that women are sacred. You see, I didn't value myself and my esteem was so low I thought I didn't deserve any better than the life on the streets. I was glad that I found my culture at this treatment center."

In treatment, she met a man who was a social worker. They married and had two children together: "This was my second chance." But that relationship was abusive and controlling, so Michelle left him. Recovery was hard. Despite a relapse, Michelle finished school, got counselling, attained an administrative job, and is growing stronger. Sadly, on April 25, 2013, Michelle's daughter Cheyenne was found dead where she landed after plunging from the 24th story of a Toronto high-rise. Michelle, family and friends believe that Cheyenne was murdered.

Today, Michelle speaks about her own experiences and those of her daughter as part of her healing journey and speaking truth to power. In addition to her four children, Michelle has two step-children and nine grandchildren whom she loves very much.

[1] Based on "Leona's Journey" posted on Wayne Simpson Photography at https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1663141627166993&id=519820018165832

RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

While all the women who shared their stories with us experienced violence or exploitation at certain points in their lives, we try to avoid the language of victimhood because "victim" can be disempowering and stigmatizing. These women are survivors of systems that marginalize and exclude them. Marie, a sex worker and advocate, was deeply moved after hearing a trafficking survivor speak at one of our workshops. She added, "We are all survivors. Survivors of violence, survivors of the child welfare system, survivors of the healthcare system." We further emphasize, however, that these women are more than survivors, they are whole people with a vast range of experiences, interests, and connections. Through our research, we learned about women's strength to survive and, sometimes, to assert control over their lives.

Resistance is an expression of agency; it refers to the ways that people register their opposition to oppression, whether directly (e.g. running away) or indirectly (e.g. rolling eyes). Closely related is the concept of resiliency. As Anishinaabe trauma expert Renee Linklater puts it, "Resiliency is the ability to withstand trauma and to be able to proceed with living" and that "Resiliency focuses on the strengths of Indigenous peoples and their cultures, providing a needed alternative to the focus on pathology, disfunction and victimization" (2014, 25).

Michelle recalls,

"There were times when I was brutally raped. I thought I was going to die. But I wanted to live and talked my way out of it. I said, 'I won't say anything," But even if I had, no one would believe me because I'm just a prostitute.'" Michelle then recounts: "He drove me back to my corner. I wanted to get back at him. So I said, 'Welcome to the wonderful world of AIDS." You should have seen his face. I don't have AIDS. That was my revenge. And then I ran like hell."

Here, we wish to emphasize that Michelle demonstrated a considerable amount of agency and resiliency because even under severely violent circumstances she was able to convince the perpetrator to drive her back to where he had picked her up.

In the excerpt below, Deb also demonstrates resistance and agency in the face of coercive pressure, as well as having the support of her sister.

Deb came home from work one day to find a couch pushed against the condo door. "So I open the door and our boyfriends have my friend in the bedroom. She obviously was resisting, and then it was a big scene. I kicked them out of my house." They sent over their top sex worker "to try to get us to come over to that side. She tried to get us to quit dancing [and start selling sex]. We had a stronger spirit than she may have thought, and we were like, 'That's stupid, we won't make any money.' They saw it wasn't going to work. I remember at one point I said, 'Are you going to beat me up? Like what are you going to do?' And that didn't work so then they started spreading rumours back home where my parents and our friends were. Then finally my sister, who happened to be dating a biker at the time, got us out of there."

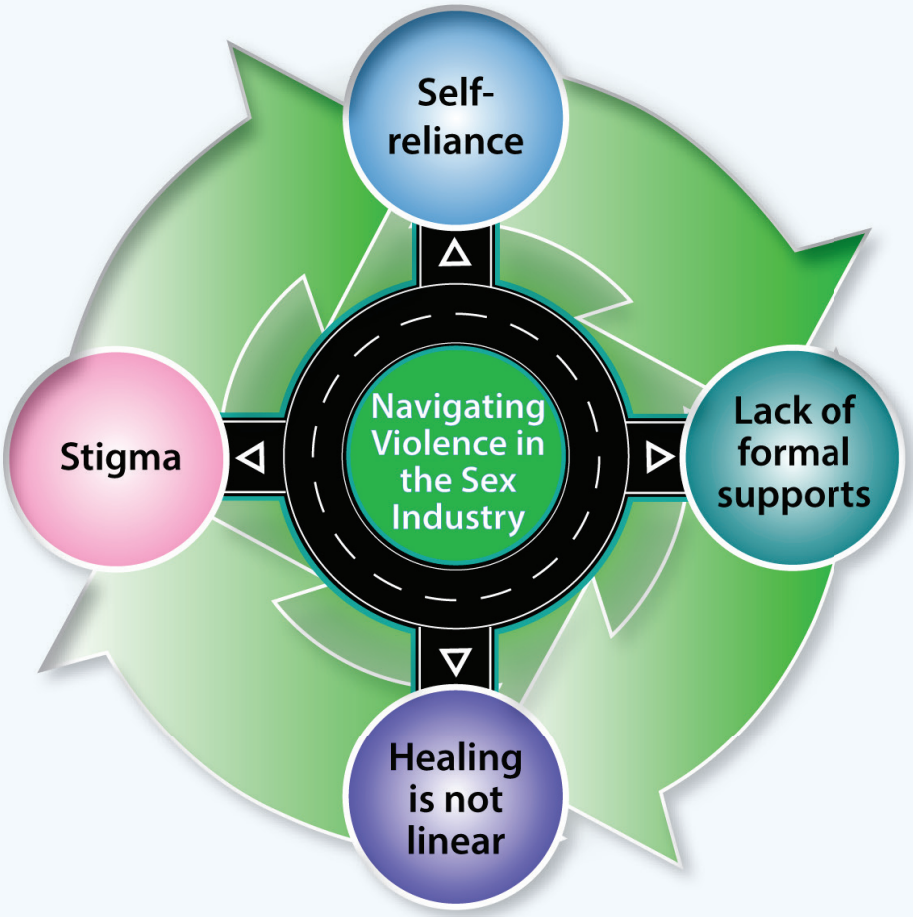


Figure 5: Navigating Violence in the Sex Industry

NAVIGATING VIOLENCE IN THE SEX INDUSTRY: IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE PROVISION

In providing service and supports to women who have experienced violence, exploitation or abuse in the sex industry, it is crucial to focus on their agency and self-determination, not their victimization. While our research participants' journeys illustrate a broad range of experiences, there are commonalities in how they navigated violence in the sex industry. Figure 5 summarizes our findings and analysis:

What we find in common is that these women often had only themselves to rely on in navigating difficult situations. Self-reliance involves the ability to trust one's own instincts in making the best choice on the basis of what is needed.

With a few exceptions, community services and state agencies played either a negligible or harmful role in their lives. When these women did seek or find support, they largely accessed informal networks of support: friends, gangs, and in the case of some, family. Supports from Indigenous community and/or resources also played a foundational role for Indigenous participants.

The stigmatization of commercial sex is a huge barrier to accessing services and being treated with dignity. The following excerpts provide various examples of how this occurs. In the box below, we see that Jenny knew she was being exploited and abused by her boyfriend/trafficker but didn't feel she could actually go to police because of stigma.

Jenny recounts, "Having sex for money was so looked down upon. It was shameful to even talk about, if I went to the police about it,

they would do an investigation for domestic violence, but nothing about the sex work part of it - they didn't understand that part of it. I was afraid to talk about it because I would be sigmatized and shamed for it, and they wouldn't look at the other parts. 'Oh, she is just getting beaten by her boyfriend, no one cares if she is out screwing other guys.'" We see that Jenny knew she was being exploited and abused by her boyfriend/trafficker but didn't feel she could actually go to the police because of stigma. In fact, Jenny told us, "some police officers used the fact that I was being exploited for their own benefit to manipulate me to have sex with them."

At one of our workshops, the comments of an Indigenous man with lived experience discussed how stigmatization denied him the opportunity to use his experience to empower and give youth tools:

"It is very difficult to get into schools to talk about human trafficking or sexual exploitation; a gap is the lack of school access. Schools don't want to get parents or kids upset. Stigma is a gap. No one wants to go there. No one wants to talk about it. If you don't talk about it, it doesn't happen."

In this next box below, we see that the shame of the sex industry negatively impacted an Indigenous mother's ability to find resources and services while her daughter was being trafficked. Furthermore, stigmatization impedes her daughter's ability to reclaim her life after involuntary involvement and experiences of violence:

An Indigenous workshop participant whose daughter was trafficked noted the stigma she faced as a parent in seeking supports. "People need to be well educated- that they are still human beings." Further, now that her daughter is back home, "How can she get a job? Word gets around. Who is going to hire her?" Especially with "charges pending" on her file.

It is powerful and healing to be able to share and speak openly about one's experiences, to be able to define oneself, and to be recognized as a whole person, and not solely as either "victim" or "whore." But judgement and stigmatization are silencing mechanisms that hinder or distort this process.

As sex work advocates have long argued, it is only "innocent" victims who are seen as worthy of rescue and support in the public eye, whereas violence experienced by willing "whores" is deemed unworthy of protection and deserved. This is particularly the case for Black, Indigenous and other racialized women who, as noted earlier, have historically and continue to be viewed as inherently sexually available.

Racism, colonialism and stigmatization all combine in Michelle's experience of discovering that Cheyenne had been killed:

"After the police told me that Chyenne was dead, I was in disbelief and wanted the number to the station that had found her. I needed clarification to make sure that it was her. The Police Officer that answered the phone said that Cheyenne had had her ID cards on her. He then told me, 'Did you know that she was a prostitute and she was on drugs and she jumped!' I was in shock that he would tell me this. I told him that he didn't have to tell me this because I was her mother. I told him to F*** off and then hung up.

"When I think about what he said to me, that he didn't care that she was someone who was truly loved and that she was a mother, daughter, granddaughter, sister, aunty, cousin and friend to many. She was loved by many. Cheyenne was such a beautiful person and anyone would have been priviledged to have known her.

"I believe that they did not do their job because she was Native and that she was working. I find that they did not do a thorough investigation because of this. My ex had to fight the system to change her death

from a suicide to undetermined. I feel that they dehumanized my daughter as if she was nothing to them. I did eventually put in a complaint against that officer and all he got was a slap on the wrist and was told to make a Sensitivity Class.

"To this day we still have no answers!"

We further note that healing or recovery is also a series of transitions: our participants are at different places in their journeys through life. For those who have suffered violence and abuse, compounded with intergenerational trauma in the case of the Indigenous survivors, healing is not a quick or linear process. We cannot overstate the importance of self-determination in this process; women must decide for themselves the directions they want to take in their wellness journeys.

Our analysis shows that these four commonalities -- self-reliance, stigma, lack of formal supports, and healing as a non-linear journey -- have significant implications for the effective and socially just delivery of services. See Figure 6:

Formal supports are important and necessary, particularly when informal supports are not strong. But it is ineffective and demeaning to use approaches that seek to "rescue" or impose "expert" solutions on "victimized" women who have acted with agency and self-reliance in their lives. We argue that effective and socially justice service provision should honor and respect the self-determination of clients.

Leona Skye provides an example of an empowering approach that she has used herself. She met a survivor who was addicted to crystal meth and encased by a pimp/biker. Leona sat with the woman and shared the story of her own journey, letting the woman see her track scars, and sharing laughs about familiar stories and people. During a lull in the conversation, Leona said to her, "Help me. I can't do this alone, there are so many girls, and they're going after them younger and younger."

The survivor got in Leona's car, and Leona drove her to a safe house. Leona also had gifts in the backseat of the car: a bag of cigarettes and fifty dollars' worth of candy bars to help with coming off meth. The whole conversation during the car ride was about how the woman saw herself helping Leona. This survivor still calls Leona regularly, telling her how she's doing and how she is speaking for small organizations about what happened. "This is how peer support works," states Leona.

As seen above, the use of paid peer outreach and peer support is key to developing effective supports that mirror the informal supports that

Figure 6: Principles for Service Delivery

people might access on their own. The use of peer supports -- or becoming a peer supporter -- can also be empowering, as seen with Jenny's experience of "having found her calling" in doing peer outreach.

Rather than contributing to the stigmatization of commercial sex or drug use, service providers should strive to be non-judgmental and actively challenge and resist demeaning stereotypes. It is important to provide access to sex positive, and sex work informed services to women who have experienced commercialized sexual and physical violence.

A harm reduction approach in particular means meeting people where they are at, that clients set their goals, not service providers, and that we celebrate successes and strengths. As Deb notes,

> "peer support is a big part of harm reduction. That's who needs to be giving out needles or condoms or whatever. What we would give is a bad trick list. Then they know you are on their side. As soon as you don't side with the john you are on their side. That's what the pimps do, the pimps often use an 'Us against them narrative.' Us against the tricks, us against society; this creates a bond and trust. It's a very effective tool. Cops don't do identify as a team with a woman. But pimps do, and it's very effective. So peer support is really important for harm reduction. And visiting them during their schedules. Women in sex work are not coming to you, and they are definitely not coming between 9-5."

We further stress the importance of trauma and violence informed approaches that are rooted in advanced knowledge of how trauma affects the whole person while also emphasizing that people are more than their experiences of trauma. The goal is to avoid causing further harm to persons accessing support. Service provision should recognize and build resiliency, self-determination and agency, and it must understand trauma through a relational lens. It is also imperative to recognize systemic trauma (from racism, poverty, discrimination, and intergenerational or historical trauma) and provide holistic supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations either come directly from our experiential participants or as part of our overall research analysis.

For policy maker recommendations (Figure 7), with regard to decolonization we refer in particular to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the Calls to Justice of the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. With regard to service provider practices, we further note that non-Indigenous persons should not be speaking for Indigenous survivors. Rather, it is important to focus on decolonizing our own assumptions and practices.

With regard to the need for safer, affordable housing in the region, we refer to the Everyone Counts: Nipissing District 2018 report on

Figure 7: Recommendations for Policy Makers

Figure 8: Recommendations for Service Providers

homelessness.

For sex work law reform, we refer to the reports and submissions of the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform and the Sex Workers Advisory Network of Sudbury (SWANS).

In their discussions with us, the experiential women noted the following: It is important to create opportunities and safer spaces so that trafficked or abused women will feel comfortable (which may take multiple encounters) in asking for help and talking freely about their experiences and needs. Women will need assistance in navigating the system (Figure 8). For potential survivors and those being exploited or abused, it is beneficial to have a paid survivor-champion present in all decisions, therapy, court sessions, and one-on-one informal representation and for counselling, healing and venting. Women in the sex industry also require quick access to safety and supports from peers who understand what is happening.

Providing opportunities for training and education empowers peers to give back in meaningful ways.

Women need assistance navigating the system and financial support in order to access specific programs, including:

- Women's center, victim witness or culturally appropriate programs;
- Housing support;
- Cultural programs;
- Advocacy;
- Liaison for court proceedings;
- Cell phones, clothing, accommodations i.e.; hotel to hide;
- Transportation;
- Tattoo removals;
- Help in changing names;
- Help in applying for a criminal pardon;

- Women's shelter;
- Lawyers to help in getting a restraining order;
- Referral for treatment;
- Accessible and sex work informed spaces;
- No barrier or low barrier safe spaces for women;
- Lock changes and exterior cameras at homes;
- A secured entrance and exterior cameras that the clients can see (i.e., at shelters, organizations);
- Counseling for women years after the actual incidences of violence;
- Supports not connected to identifying as a victim of human trafficking;
- Supports not connected to "exiting";
- No wait times;
- Collaboration with sex work positive and sex worker led organizations;
- Access to internet, wifi, and tech to connect online.

It is important to support a client in the decision that she makes, no matter what it is.

Social service workers and front-line workers should be trained by sex worker led organizations around how to make their spaces and services more informed and accessible for sex workers.

Indigenous specific recommendations include providing Native Liaison Court Workers and offering traditional healing to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Survivors, support workers and consultants. Traditional healing, which creates relations and reconnections, includes monthly sweats to encourage self-care for service providers, clients, and their support people. To honour survivors and those seeking assistance in exiting, provide a gift of a medicine bag and smudge bundle. There should also be Elder guidance to clients and agency personnel in all aspects of the program (see Niagara Chapter et al, 2018).

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ADDITIONAL NORAHT RESOURCES

Website

Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking (NORAHT) website: https://noraht.nipissingu.ca/noraht-research/webinars/.

Webinars

Quenneville, Brenda and Gina Snooks. "Intersectional Trauma-Informed Approaches to Human Trafficking in Northeastern Ontario." Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Learning Network. Webinar, 2019.

Nagy Rosemary and Kathleen Jodouin. "Strategies for Service Provider Collaboration." Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. Webinar. 2020.

Jodouin, Kathleen. "Safer Places: Harm Reduction Strategies to Address Human Trafficking." Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. Webinar. 2020.

Toolkits

"Trauma and Violence Informed Approaches to Human Trafficking: A Critical Reflection Workbook for Service Providers." North Bay: Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking, 2020.

"Service Mapping Toolkit". North Bay: Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking, 2020.

Policy Briefs

"Violence, Exploitation and Abuse in the Sex Trade: Strategies for Service Provider Collaboration," Policy Brief No. 1, Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. 2020.

"Trauma and Violence Informed Approaches to Service Provision," Policy Brief No. 2, Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. 2020.

"Decolonize Our Actions! Providing Services to Indigenous Persons involved in the Sex Industry," Policy Brief No. 3, Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. 2020.

"Safer Spaces: Harm Reduction Strategies to Address Human Trafficking," Policy Brief No. 4, Northeastern Ontario Research Alliance on Human Trafficking. 2020.

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