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The Indigenous Girls Being Pushed into Canada's Sex Trade Are Getting Younger and Younger

By Martha Troian Apr 2 2014



Iqaluit. Photo via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Kimmy (not her real name) was just 12 years old the first time she gave a grown man a handjob for money. Her 13-year old sister helped, and the more they giggled, the more money they got. “It was bizarre,” Kimmy says. “It’s one of those times where it’s like, *is this really happening?*”

Kimmy was introduced to the sex industry by her biological sister when she lived in a foster home in northern Ontario. She is just one of many young Indigenous girls exploited—or trafficked—in Canada. But it isn’t just pimps, johns, or gangs, who are doing the trafficking. Increasingly, it can be their own family members and relatives; and it’s taking place in Indigenous communities, or in towns and cities, across the country.

According to the Canadian justice system’s definition, human trafficking usually happens because of force, threats or coercion. However, a national human trafficking task force is seeking to change the legal definition: “The traffickers have changed in how they are recruiting, luring and controlling women,” says Diane Redsky, project director of the Human Trafficking Task Force at the Canadian Women’s Foundation. Redsky is also from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation in western Ontario.

She says these days, Indigenous women who are trafficked don’t necessarily fear for their safety nor are fear tactics always used. “The trafficking of Indigenous women and girls is conducted very differently,” says Redsky. “The victims are ‘trauma bonding’ with their traffickers.”

Redsky says “trauma bonding” is less like fear and more like a strong sense of loyalty: “Traffickers are becoming fathers and husbands to their victims,” explains Redsky.

In the case of Kimmy, it was her own sister.

Kimmy says she performed sex acts out of not just loyalty to her sister—but also guilt. A desire to help and protect. “There's a tight bond, especially for younger children and teens—the pimping out—there's a strong family connection there,” says Helen Roos. Roos is the principle researcher behind a report released earlier this year on sexual exploitation and human trafficking in Nunavut.

Children and youth with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) or learning disabilities are also at-risk of being pimped out to bring in money or material goods for the family, says Roos.

Roos says poverty can be a big factor in the sexual exploitation of children by family members or friends. And the children are getting younger and younger. Her research revealed that at the community level, girls as young as 10 to 11 years old are being pimped out.

“The demand is seeking younger and younger girls—that's an extreme sexual fetish,” says Roos.

For their research, the Canadian Women Foundation met with over 250 organizations and 160 survivors of sexual exploitation between 2013 and 2014. It's part a \$2 million dollar strategy to address human trafficking. The Foundation is also developing recommendations and an anti-trafficking strategy for the Federal Government. But they also know they need to move fast.

“What we know about human trafficking in Canada is that traffickers will gain financially more for an underage girl than they will for an adult woman,” says Redsky. When they hit their early 20s, girls are not considered as valuable to traffickers anymore, but those who remain in the industry face serious risks as well.

“By the time they're 40, they're dying,” says Redsky. “Our bodies are not meant to have sex with 10-15 men a day, 7 days a week.” Roos says kids are being numbed to the sexual exploitation—but she also says the sexual exploitation is beginning to span generations.

“My granny used to work too,” says Kimmy. And now Kimmy's own daughter is involved in prostitution in northern Ontario as well.

Currently drawing up recommendations to present to the Department of Justice to seek changes in the legislation, the Canadian Women's Foundation is also designing an anti-trafficking strategy. “There will be a role for everyone including government, non-profit organizations, funding sources, including the foundation,” says Redsky. “Everyone will have a role in Canada.”

Their anti-trafficking strategy will be launched in the Fall 2014.