

SAFER SPACES WHITE PAPER #3
PATHWAYS TO ENTRY



YWCA
HALIFAX

NATIONAL ADVOCACY.
COMMUNITY ACTION.

INTRODUCTION

The global billion-dollar adult sex industry is supposed to be an 18+ world. It is a world that is romanticized in our culture and normalized by our economy, and still kids are engaged sometimes by force, coercion or manipulation and sometimes because of a lack of opportunity, poverty and homelessness. And sometimes, youth are engaged because participation in the sex industry is perceived as a normal and easy way to make good, fast money. In short, there are many pathways for youth to enter the illicit underground world of the adult sex industry.

Almost all youth who become engaged in the adult sex trade, or who rely on the exchange of sexual acts for money, drugs or other material items, are doing so to have particular needs fulfilled. These needs can be tangible, such as the need for housing, money, or drugs; or they may be intangible, such as the need for love, belonging and community. Each need is related to a particular risk factor or social vulnerability that enables their pathway to entry.

For example, a youth that demonstrates a need for love and sexual attention is at high risk if they also have a history of childhood sexual abuse or if they do not have an existing framework for a healthy relationship. Their need for love can be exploited by a third party by inserting themselves into the youth's life as a boyfriend/girlfriend or romantic partner and then manipulating them into working in the sex trade for the benefit of the relationship, or "family".

If a youth has a need for shelter or money to support their rent, food, and transportation, they are at risk of being exploited by a third party. If a young person lacks opportunities to good-paying jobs due to their location, lack of education or gender or racial identity, they are more vulnerable to adults who offer to meet their material needs in exchange for sexual acts.

Youth who use substances and cannot afford to maintain that use without a source of income are also vulnerable. It is important to note here that the substance may be something such as cigarettes,

alcohol or marijuana, and does not necessarily have to involve the more expensive habits like opioids or crack/cocaine. These youths are at high risk for exploitation by a third party that offers those substances, or money to purchase them, in exchange for sexual acts.

There are many other needs that can be perceived as filled by participation in the sex trade, such as the need for community, belonging, or even fun. This paper will examine youth needs in the context vulnerabilities and risk factors that influence their pathways to entry into the adult sex trade.

Understanding how young people become engaged in the adult sex industry is important for identifying potential intervention points at various stages of their engagement. Knowing the risk factors, the realities, and the methodical ways perpetrators lure, groom, manipulation and control youth to stay, can assist in the development of appropriate prevention,

intervention and aftercare policies and programming. While it is generally understood that we can prevent sexual exploitation and human trafficking by empowering kids with the information they need to identify and resist sexual predators, we can also reduce their risk of sexual exploitation by recognizing where the system is failing to meet their needs. If we can find ways to provide the appropriate supports and to get their needs filled in different and healthy ways, it is only then that we can effectively prevent entry and/or help them leave.

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VULNERABILITIES AND RISKS

Social and systemic vulnerabilities create and increase youth risk for exploitation within the sex trade. A 2008 UN report that examined the global risk factors that make someone vulnerable to sexual exploitation and human trafficking included (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008):

- Age
- Gender
- Poverty
- Social and cultural exclusion
- Limited access to education
- Political instability, war and conflict
- Social, cultural and legal frameworks
- Movement
- Demand

While these vulnerabilities often compound into the “highest risk” for human trafficking around the world, in Nova Scotia, these risks are relevant to varying degrees and are often context dependent.

GENDER

“Prostitution is a gendered survival strategy that involves the assumption of unreasonable risks by the person in it”

(FARLEY, LYNNE, & COTTON, 2005)

By simply being a girl, or a female-identifying person, the risk for exploitation and human trafficking increases significantly. This is why the vast majority of programs and services support girls and women. The 2019 US National Trafficking Hotline Data Report indicated that 68% of those who called into the hotline were female (Polaris Project, 2019) and Statistics Canada reported that 97% of police-reported human trafficking victims across Canada in 2018 were women and girls (Cotter, 2020).

The systemic reasons for this are deeply embedded in our culture, economy and politics. While many strides have been made to bring gender equity to our culture, economic and political systems, we have not yet come to terms with these foundational ideas about women and girls as being objects of sexual property.

Gender-identity can also be fluid and unbounded, particularly for youth. The linkages between gender and sexuality are difficult for the average person to pull apart and understand. Youth who explore their sexuality and gender, and break out of seemingly outdated norms and beliefs about sex and gender, can be objectified and marginalized from the mainstream, making them particularly vulnerable for sexual exploitation.

In 2016 The 2015 US Trans-Gender Survey Report found that 20% of trans folk work in the underground economy; 41% experienced physical violence while engaged in that work; and trans folk were 3 times as likely

to be attacked than cis-gender people (Polaris Project, 2017). Those at highest risk for violence were found to be trans-women of colour (Polaris Project, 2017). So while, historically, being a girl presents a significant risk for sexual exploitation; for racialized girls, and for gender fluid and diverse youth the stakes are higher still.

It is important to recognize that boys and men are also victims of sexual exploitation. In 2019, 13% of those who called into the US National Human Trafficking Hotline were male (Polaris Project, 2019). In Nova Scotia, the risks to boys and men are compounded by poverty and being street-involved.



HISTORY OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND TRAUMA

"The long term effects of childhood sexual abuse are varied, complex and often devastating."

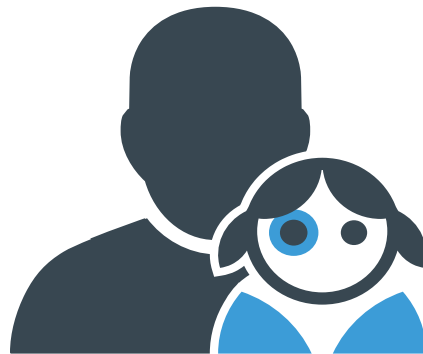
(AMERICAN COLLEGE OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNECOLOGISTS, 2011)

Childhood sexual abuse can lead to risky sexual behaviour and drug use (Stoltz, et al., 2007). A 2005 survey of 100 sex workers in Vancouver found that 82% reported a history of childhood sexual abuse by an average of 4 perpetrators (Farley, Lynne, & Cotton, 2005). Many studies have concluded that this type of childhood trauma is a strong predictor of future engagement in the sex trade (Stoltz, et al., 2007). Victims of CSEC "typically experience myriad abusive encounters which usually start at an early age. This often sets the youth up for a high level of dangerous behavior as

she navigates and attempts to numb the confusion of her abusive environment" (Shared Hope International, 2009)

The sexual objectification of women and girls is pervasive and built on historical practices that treat women as property and cultural practices that hold that a girl is a woman with the coming of her period. This is particularly true for women and girls labelled promiscuous, sexually precocious or slutty. El Jones referred to them as the "first girls"

"I think about how those girls were sacrifices: not just to boys, or to schools that disciplined



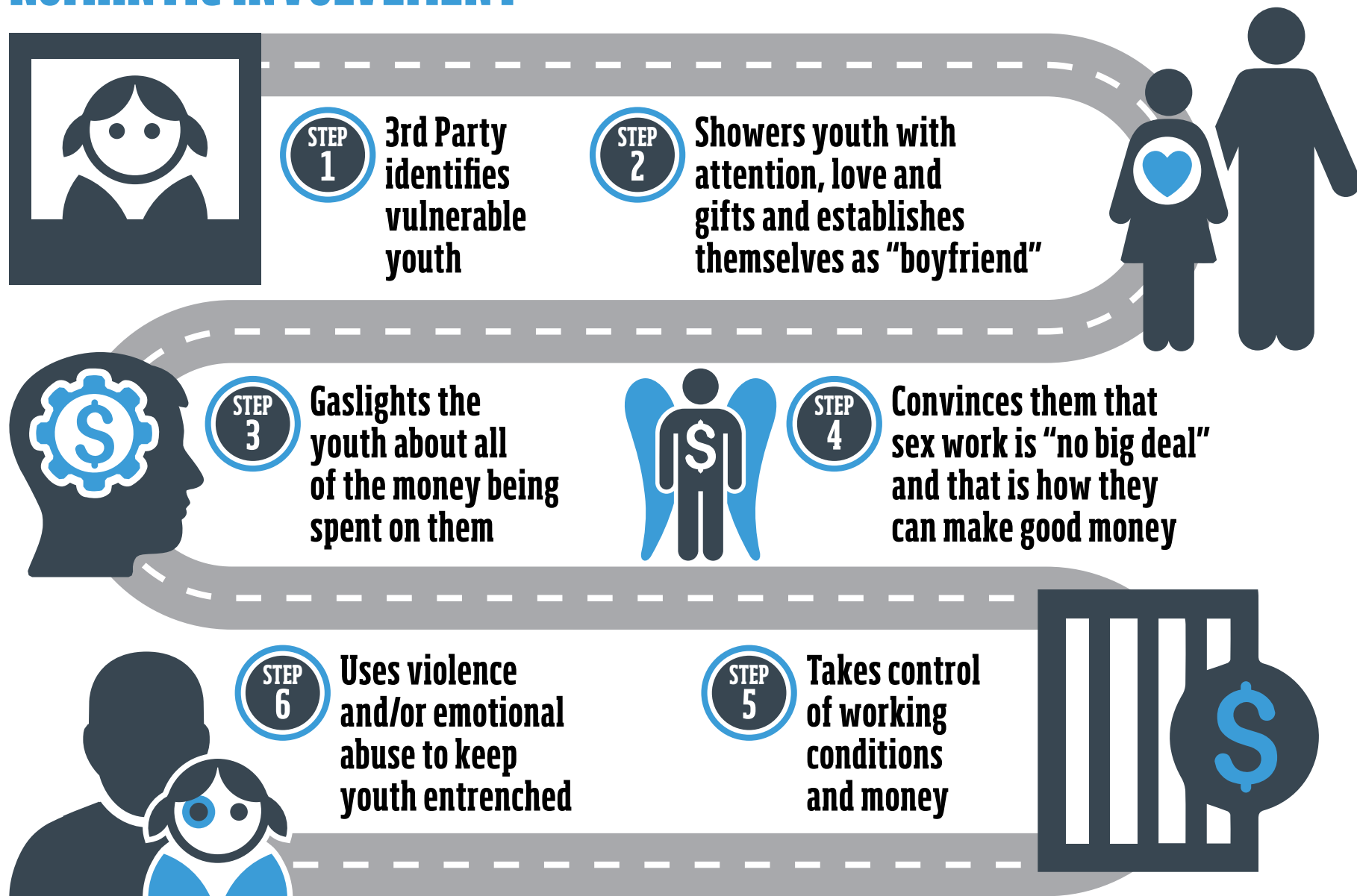
and suspended them, and to disapproving parents, but also to us, their friends, who took from them the danger, and had nothing to give back for the pain... I think about how they were labelled. The ones called sluts, throwaways, trouble makers, bad girls, failures, behaviour problems, poor influences, trash. The ones whose suffering we couldn't see. The ones who are the bridges we crossed over on." (Jones, 2019)

Culturally the experiences of these "first girls" have been romanticized and celebrated in literature and film, creating a form of acceptance and normalization in their sexual objectification. Certainly for racialized women this is more pervasive, who experience additional and intersectional oppression of race/ethnicity on top of overt sexual objectification. These celebrated first girl narratives often don't take into account the trauma

or childhood sexual abuse that is usually associated with advanced sexual independence and precociousness. Youth with a history of childhood sexual abuse often engage in risky sexual behaviours and experience disruptions in normative sexual and romantic relationships (Shair, 2012)

This history of trauma can soften youth to participating in the sex trade through the process of traumatic sexualization; when sexuality has been shaped and influenced in developmentally inappropriate ways (Shared Hope, 2009). Perpetrators understand the vulnerabilities of survivors of childhood sexual abuse, will exploit their trauma and position themselves as a romantic partner. Perpetrators take advantage of the normalized risky sexual behaviors that have resulted from their experiences.

PATHWAYS TO ENTRY SCENARIO: ROMANTIC INVOLVEMENT



INDIGENEITY

“The violence experienced by women who are sex workers, sexually exploited, and/or trafficked is not separate from colonial violence, but a central part of it.”

(ROUDOMETKINA & WAKEFORD, 2018)

Numerous research reports from across Canada, including The Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, indicate that Indigenous women and girls are vastly over-represented in the sex trade: “sexually exploited Indigenous children and youth make up more than 90% of the visible sex trade, even where Indigenous people make up less than 10% of the population.” *(The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019)*

There are a number of factors that increase Indigenous women and girls risk that stem from ongoing historic and gendered inequality. “Canada’s colonial legacy has forced Indigenous women and girls into dangerous and precarious social and economic conditions, which in turn has made them more vulnerable to different kinds of violence” *(Roudometkina & Wakeford, 2018)*.

These risk factors are further increased if there is a family history of residential school *(Ferland, Denby, & Neuman, 2012)*. The colonial sexualization of Indigenous women’s bodies and the ways in which our cultural, political and economic systems in Canada, perpetuate this makes Indigenous women and girls “easy targets for traffickers who prey on this vulnerability and count on society’s turning a blind eye.” *(The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019)*

“Since early colonization, Indigenous women’s have been positioned by Western ideology as inherently violable and less valuable than non-Indigenous, non-racialized bodies. During early colonial contact, this directly disrupted the gendered social configurations of communities, as women’s authority was dismissed in early economic and political interactions between colonizers and Indigenous peoples. The cultural understanding of Indigenous women as sexual, unworthy, and therefore violable was subsequently enshrined into law” *(Roudometkina & Wakeford, 2018)*



POVERTY

“People living in poverty are often either ignored or penalized by the larger society. Therefore, poverty often serves to silence and discredit victims/survivors, especially when it is compounded by other forms of oppression and isolation.”

(GRECO, 2007)

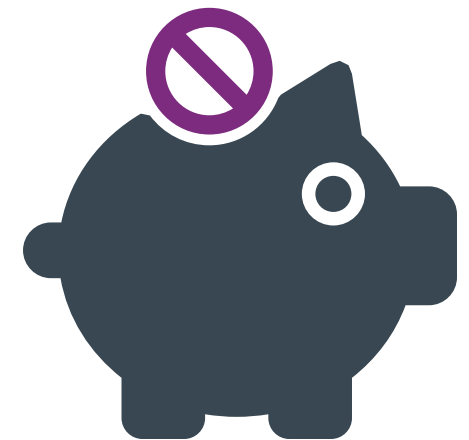
According to the 2019 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Nova Scotia, 1 in 4 Nova Scotia children are living in poverty (*Frank & Fisher, 2020*). Economic insecurity is amplified by a low minimum wage, and income assistance rates that are not in line with the current costs of living. For children and youth living in poverty, the sex trade can appear to be a way to make fast and easy money, particularly engagement that happens virtually through

camming or selling their own intimate images.

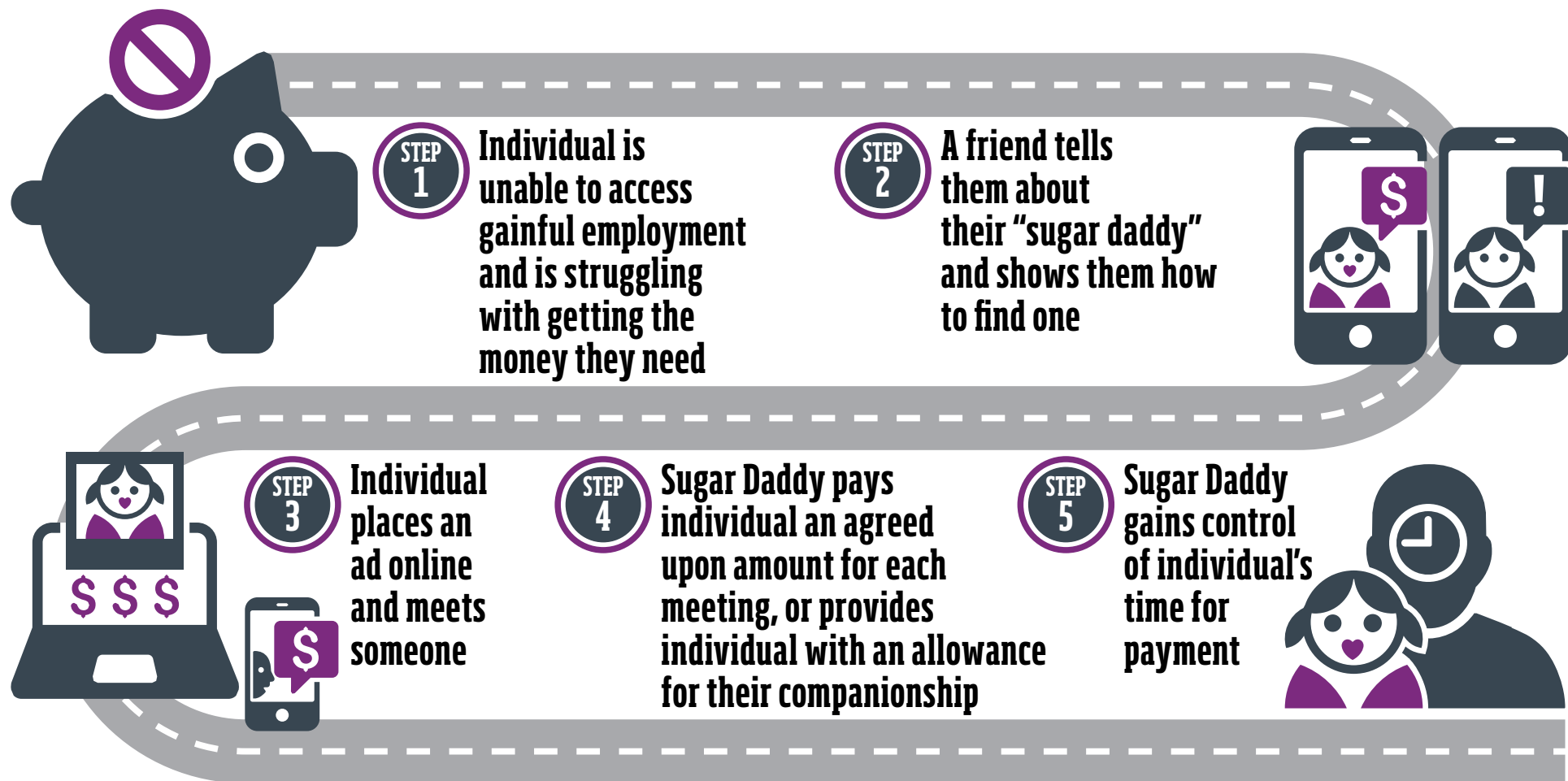
Sometimes family poverty can lead to familial trafficking and exploitation, where a family member is the perpetrator that controls the involvement and money of youth.

Perpetrators can exploit this vulnerability through false promises of lucrative jobs in modelling, acting and even the trades.

Youth who live in poverty can become dependent on the material benefits and find economic security in their participation, particularly if they have not completed their schooling and have no apparent prospects for earning a living wage.



PATHWAYS TO ENTRY SCENARIO: ECONOMIC INSECURITY



HOMELESSNESS AND STREET-INVOLVEMENT

“Giving money or other things to a young person in exchange for sex is a form of sexual abuse, a violation of their right to be free from coercion (including the pressure of economic survival) in deciding when and with whom to have sex.”

(SAEWYC, DROZDA, RIVERS, MACKAY, & PELED, 2013)

Youth leave their family home for a variety of reasons and their lack of safe housing or shelter puts them at a high risk for exploitation. Broadly, it is estimated that 1 in 3 homeless youth have traded sex for money, drugs or other things, and research indicates that most homeless youth begin trading sex for drugs and money after they have become homeless or street-involved *(Saewyc, Drozda, Rivers, MacKay, & Peled, 2013)*.

Even though being street-involved creates many vulnerabilities that make youth susceptible to manipulation and control, not all of the exploitation that happens to homeless youth involves a “pimp” or 3rd party that is controlling or directing the youth. Much of the exploitation that happens among homeless youth is driven by material needs fulfillment.

Street-involved youth do not necessarily view this exchange of sex for money, drugs or other things as participation in the sex trade as a sex worker or victim of exploitation but rather as a survival tactic. For some populations, particularly boys and gender-diverse individuals, the trade of sex for money, drugs or a place to stay may be normalized. The term “homelesssexual” has emerged to label the linkage between the trade of sex for housing. Perpetrators who exploit

homeless and street-involved youth are generally the recipients of sexual favors in exchange for money, drugs, transportation, or rent. They may believe that they are “helping” youth by filling these basic survival needs.

SUBSTANCE USE

“Substance abuse and sexual victimization both carry a great deal of social stigma in and of themselves, and when a victim/survivor holds both, the stigma can be especially difficult to overcome”.

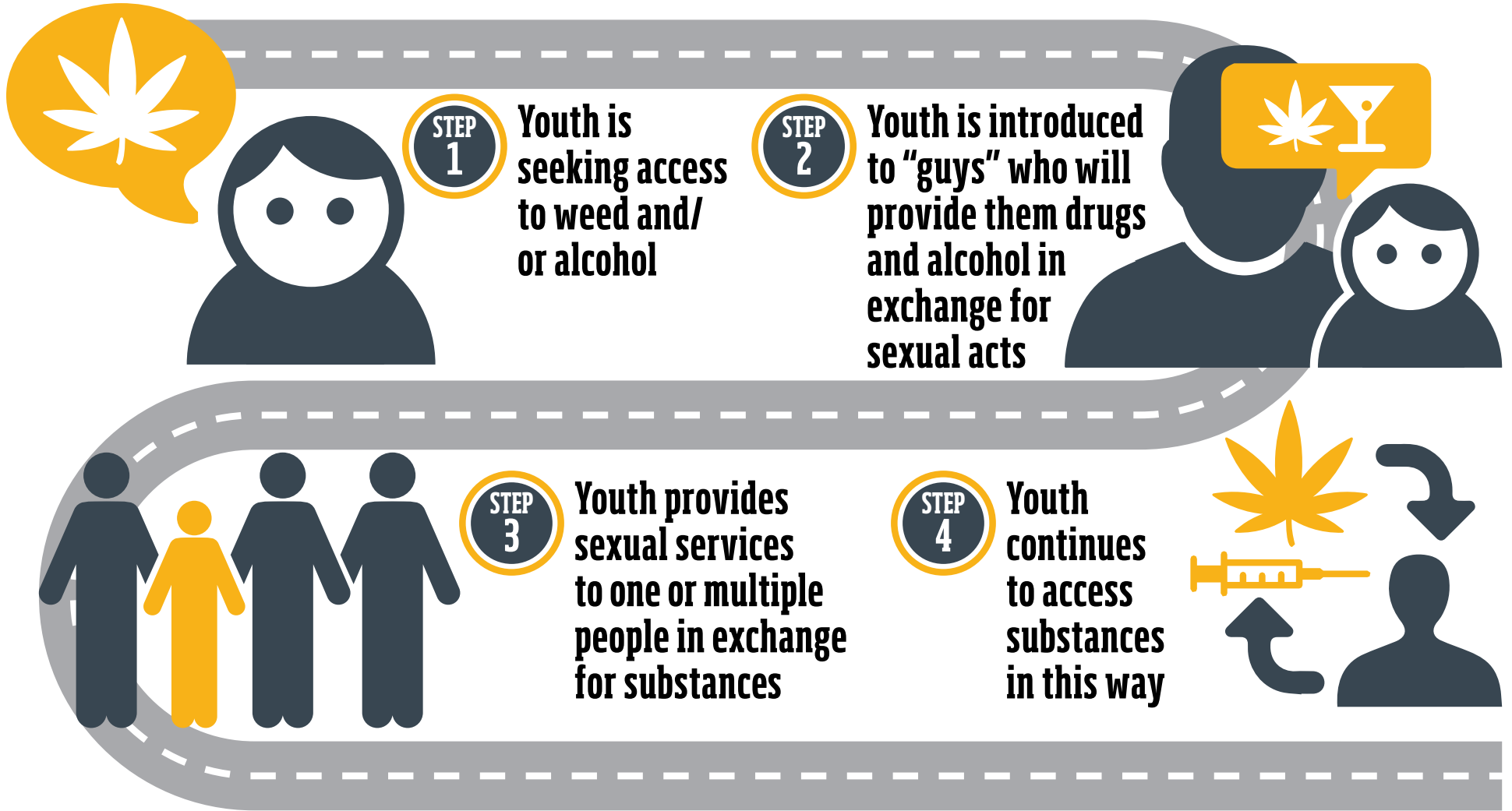
(DAWGERT, 2009)

In Nova Scotia, many youths begin trading sex for drugs as their initial pathway into the sex trade. This may begin and end with marijuana and/or alcohol, however among the adult population of people engaged, crack, cocaine and

opioid addiction will contribute to their ongoing participation. Youth who are participating in the sex trade to support or maintain substance use can lead to significant social, economic and cultural marginalization, which will also impact their ability to exit. Perpetrators who exploit youth due to substance use could be those who possess, prescribe or deal in drugs; instead of providing money in exchange for sexual favors, they will provide the desired substances. Traffickers and pimps will also leverage substance use as a mechanism to control victims, through the control of their substance use; determining when and how much is distributed to an individual.



PATHWAYS TO ENTRY SCENARIO: ACCESS TO SUBSTANCES



SOCIAL ISOLATION & THE INTERNET

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, different measures have been introduced to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, including social distancing, confinement, and working and learning from home. Children have experienced confinement in the home bringing challenges for their safety online and offline.”

(EUROPOL, 2020)

Participation in the sex trade is generally associated with urban communities, however in Nova Scotia, there are documented cases in many rural communities. Living in a rural location and geographic isolation can amplify risks associated with a lack of economic opportunities, a lack of transportation and a lack of community-based services and supports for youth. In addition to geographic isolation, social isolation that occurs within the school community can also

contribute to a young person’s risk factors. Youth who have been bullied or who have dropped out of school in junior high or high school face significant social isolation from their peers and miss out on opportunities to develop pro-social behaviours and find a sense of community and belonging. The need for connectedness makes youth vulnerable to influence from peers and older adults, who are offering a community related to their engagement.

Geographic and social isolation is a tactic of traffickers who move victims away from their home community and social supports to gain control and create a dependency and bond to them. In Nova Scotia, this movement can include moving from a rural community to an urban one, or to Moncton, NB, which is the closest city where there are legally operating strip clubs. Trafficking victims out of province often results in multiple moves across Canada – primarily to Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

The sex trade has evolved and thrived with the advance of the Internet and the transfer of videos and images. The digital exchange and sale of virtual sexual services and intimate images and videos is booming, particularly in the wake

of Covid-19 (*Europol, 2020*). Within hours of closing due to Public Health measures, strip clubs across North America opened subscription-based services to customers on social media and in other virtual environments. Camming, the public or private live performance of sexual acts online, has also exploded, with the vast majority of the population being home, online and bored.

But the risks associated with Internet Access go much deeper than simply providing easy access to the platforms. It is also a stalking ground for predators on many social media platforms. The Internet is a place where children and youth gather unsupervised and communicate with one another. The social norms around meeting strangers online, unfiltered posting and the exchange of intimate photos and videos are quite unique to youth, and those who have been using the Internet for most, if not all of their lives.

Perpetrators seek out and engage with vulnerable youth on social media platforms who are often posting their whole lives online. It may be an innocent tiktok dance, a vent about problems at home or school, or as they are experimenting with their sexuality posting “sexy” photos. Perpetrators are generally adults who troll popular social media

platforms seeking easy targets. They may be seeking their own personal gratification, or they may be traffickers and pimps seeking new recruits for their business. The tactics remain the same, a deliberative luring and grooming of youth for future sexual contact or engagement in the sex trade.

It has been reported that since the pandemic, there has been an increase in chatter and transactional exchanges on the Dark Web, in addition to the explosion on the World Wide Web (*Europol, 2020*). The Dark Web is the untraceable and non-trackable underbelly of the Internet that is only accessible through an encrypted browser that allows users to remain anonymous. On the Dark Web the sale of young children and child pornography is common. Also common is the exchange of tips and tricks among perpetrators on how to lure, recruit, groom and control children and youth for sexual purposes.



PATHWAYS TO ENTRY SCENARIO: SOCIAL ISOLATION



STEP 1 Youth has a difficult family life, dropped out of school and is socially isolated from positive peer influences

STEP 2 Youth becomes friends with another youth who is making money by posting ads online and turning tricks



STEP 3 Friend takes youth under their wing and offers to post ads for them



STEP 4 Youth begins to turn tricks and gives friend a portion of the money made through the ads



DISCUSSION

Although the age of legal consent for sexual activity in Canada is 16, this assumption is removed if the sexual partner is a person in a position of power, trust, authority, or dependency. This is also removed if the sexual partner is paying for the experience, or exchanging it for anything of value or necessity, such as drugs or housing. In these cases, the age of consent increases to 18 through the Criminal Code's Sexual Exploitation laws.

Regardless of how they enter the adult sex industry, youth under 18 engaged in the sex trade are doing so without legal capacity to consent to their own participation. In short, they are being sexually exploited for commercial purposes. However, legal consent and choice are two different things. Many youths choose to participate in the sex trade for a variety of reasons and influenced by multiple factors.

The culturally romanticized and normalized portrayal of the sex

trade often does not include a whole picture of the lifestyle. The luxury and fun that is typically seen in movies, music videos and reality TV often doesn't reference the trauma and violence that can result in sex trade engagement. Additionally, participation in the sex trade can also lead to a significant chance of developing musculoskeletal and auto-immune problems and other health issues like arthritis, fibromyalgia and gastrointestinal illnesses (*Silliker, 2017*)

Prevention of CSEC must include reducing youth vulnerabilities and risks of exploitation by fulfilling the needs that those vulnerabilities create. Youth targeted education and awareness campaigns about the warning signs of luring and grooming, sexual exploitation, and the realities of the sex trade are critical, but they cannot be the only prevention strategy implemented to address the diversity of pathways to entry in the sex trade. When we solely focus on education and

awareness, we are shifting the burden and responsibility of prevention onto the victim rather than dealing with the structural and social systems that enable this type of victimization to occur. Recognizing the root causes of CSEC and its connection to lifelong involvement in the sex trade, prevention can and should include strategies that reduce gender and racial inequity, economic and housing insecurity, and the impact of substance use and addiction more generally. Once children and youth become entrenched in and dependent on the sex trade as their primary source of income, their outcomes as adults include higher rates of physical and mental health issues, higher rates of violence and trauma, and higher rates of criminalization and incarceration. Prevention strategies must also be inclusive of the experiences of non-trafficked, street-involved youth who are being exploited due to their lack of basic needs, rather than by a 3rd party pimp or perpetrator. Crucial to this development is a Gender-Based Analysis of homeless youth who are involved in the sex trade, recognizing that this is the pathway for many boys, men

and gender diverse folks who are marginalized by their sexuality or gender identity.

We must also develop strategies to engage and intervene with perpetrators, whether they are buyers or sellers of youth sexual services. Further to working with Johns and Pimps, with such a predictable indicator of sex trade involvement being linked to childhood sexual abuse, prevention must also include strategies to deal with adults who sexually abuse children even outside of the sex trade context, especially if it is happening within the family home.

The complexity of familial trafficking and exploitation requires intensive intervention from the Child Welfare System. And while the systemic involvement of Child Welfare, and the apprehension of children into foster and residential care can be risk factors in themselves, when a youth's perpetrator is a parent or caregiver, removal of the child is the best and most appropriate intervention, at least until a time when the parent or caregiver no longer is a threat to the child or youth.

CONCLUSION

Of course it would be wonderful if there was an easy answer to how to prevent the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth in Nova Scotia. The diversity of experiences that ultimately provide pathways for youth into the adult sex trade means that there really is no silver bullet. While some believe that prevention begins with youth education and ends with perpetrator incarceration, this will simply never be enough.

In order to be effective, prevention strategies must address the cultural, social and structural underpinnings of sexual violence and exploitation that have enabled the sex trade to become a global billion-dollar industry. Sexual exploitation and trafficking are often not part of conversations about poverty, homelessness, racism, colonization, addictions, and intimate partner and gender-based violence. But we are beginning to understand that CSEC is a much more common thread among many girls,

women and gender diverse folks accessing a variety of social services across Nova Scotia through deliberative engagement with those participating in the sex trade, regardless of the pathway that brought them there.

While it is important not to confound trafficking, exploitation and sex work as the one and the same, understanding and responding to the problem of CSEC must be done in its context of the adult sex trade. Nor can we deem which participants are most worthy of safety, dignity, services and supports based on the pathway they entered the sex trade.

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