

**SAFER SPACES WHITE PAPER #4**

# **THE PERPETRATORS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, ABUSE, AND VIOLENCE IN THE SEX TRADE**



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# INTRODUCTION

The adult commercial sex industry operates on the same principles as any industry within a capitalist framework – it is driven by the supply and demand of sexual labour. In Canada, this industry is largely criminalized, therefore, the risk of exploitation and trafficking is high for participants. In previous White Papers in this series, we break down what exploitation looks like, and discuss which populations are most at risk. Let's now turn our attention to the perpetrators of sexual exploitation.

Law enforcement in Nova Scotia places a heavy emphasis on interrupting supply through investigations of 3rd parties responsible for exploiting individuals working in this industry. These perpetrators, commonly referred to as pimps, manipulate, coerce, and threaten vulnerable and marginalized individuals into providing sexual services for their profit and material benefit.

In Nova Scotia, this “supply-side” perpetration happens to children and youth in the context of

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (“CSEC”), as well as to adults, some of whom are manipulated, forced, and threatened by 3rd parties to provide sexual services to support their domestic households and families.

There are also perpetrators on the demand side of the industry – a growing part of the commercial sex industry that has only been accelerated by Covid-19. This includes individuals who purchase sexual services and consume sexually explicit content online from those who are under the age of 18. The individuals who directly purchase sexual services are most commonly known as the “Dates” or “Tricks” and more recently “Sugar Daddies/Mamas”. There are also perpetrators in our communities that exploit children under the guise that they are “helping” them by providing basic material needs in exchange for sex.

Ubiquitous mobile and camera technology has made the production and distribution of personal intimate images normal and expected

in dating and courtship rituals, therefore, the jump to producing them for sale and profit is not as taboo as it once was. Producing such images can be a very lucrative endeavor for youth and adults who do not earn a living wage. Most individuals profiting or materially benefiting from the sale of sexually explicit content (photos, videos, and live streams) are the producers themselves, who often must pay websites, such as OnlyFans, a percentage of their earnings to access the platform. In addition to subscription sites like OnlyFans, the producers of this content often scout and advertise on online dating sites and mainstream social media channels. When these producers are under the age of 18, the content they are producing is de facto child pornography. Purchasers of such images or videos are therefore in possession of child pornography.

In Canada, it is illegal to purchase sexual services from another individual, regardless of their age. Despite the prevalence of these crimes, low prosecution rates of these types of offences are largely explained by the fact that commercial exploitation of children

is a hard crime to detect, as victims are often not able to report the offence to authorities. Further, many adults engaged in the industry have strained relationships with the police due to complicated histories with the criminal justice system, again resulting in low reporting rates.

This white paper explores the different types of perpetration within the sex trade on both as it relates to supply and demand by exploring the topics of pimps, peer recruiting, bad dates, “groomers”, and sugar daddies/mamas. We will also analyze institutional and cultural responses to such perpetrations and propose alternatives that could serve as tools to address the root of the issue.

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# WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

It is commonly accepted that sexual exploitation and human trafficking is a gendered issue. Research indicates that perpetrators are most commonly male adults, both as purchasers and suppliers. Victims are most commonly trans and cis women and girls. However, in a society where the boundaries of gender are dissolving, it is important to recognize that such trends continue to shift.

Emergent research on the experiences of trans and cis boys and men demonstrate trends that challenge the commonly accepted gender division among victims and perpetrators. In a 2013 American study titled *And Boys Too*, Sara Ann Friedman wrote: “The little attention paid to boys has focused on them as exploiters, pimps and buyers of sexual services or as active participants in sex work—not as victims or survivors”. A 2020 Statistics Canada report

on police-reported human trafficking indicates that 19% of those accused were female, and among the youth charged, 59% were female (Cotter, 2020). As sexual power dynamics continue to shift, we are observing an emerging market for female demand within the industry.

In this section, we look at the six most prevalent perpetrators today.

## PIMPS

Pimps are 3rd party individuals that use coercion and control to benefit both materially and financially from someone else’s participation in sexual activity.

Despite stereotypical portrayals in media and pop culture, there is no identified criminal profile of a pimp: they can be any age, gender, race, or class. Commonly, pimps are known to their victims, either as friends, romantic partners, family members, mentors, or even as employers. Regardless of their relationship to the victim, they typically employ the same calculated and methodical tactics. Such tactics combine military brainwashing techniques and human needs fulfillment theories. Manuals and guides on pimping have been compiled and distributed by a variety of sources online and over the Dark Web.

All perpetrators lure, groom, recruit and exploit their victims. This pattern is considered foundational knowledge for law enforcement and service providers alike across North America.

- **Luring** – the vulnerable individual is identified and engaged (see *White Paper #3* for an in-depth look at risk factors that make youth vulnerable).
- **Grooming** – a relationship is formed between the victim and the perpetrator through promises for the future, and intense needs fulfillment.
- **Recruiting** – the idea of working in the commercial sex trade is introduced, harms are minimized, and material reward is amplified.
- **Exploiting** – the perpetrator isolates the victim, limits their freedoms, and takes control of their working conditions and money through psychological and/or physical violence.

Based on the limited information available, it should be considered that this pattern is not applicable in cases of familial trafficking, where the pimp is also a parent, guardian, or another family member. In such cases, familial and cultural dynamics intersect with vulnerability, risk, relationship, normalization, control, and abuse – the process is lifelong and runs deep.

Finally, some pimps operate through legitimate business fronts and have large-scale operations that recruit remotely with the promise of lucrative employment opportunities out of province. For example, these businesses sometimes appear to be modeling or talent agencies. In 2020, YWCA Halifax conducted a survey called “Hearing Them”, the respondents of which were folks currently and formerly engaged in the sex trade. One respondent indicated that a company targeted her once they knew she was a woman seeking a job in her skilled trade. The company took advantage of her as they knew that employment opportunities for women in such fields are minimal and complicated by gender inequity.

## “HUSBANDS”

Some adult sex workers who are engaged in the industry and identify as being independent are also being manipulated, forced, and threatened by 3rd parties to provide sexual services to support their domestic households and families. Often referred to as “husbands,” these perpetrators are not often thought of or treated as “pimps” because they are domestic partners with their victims, and only exploit or traffic them individually. The victims may or may not be married to their perpetrators, however, the key defining factor of the relationship is co-dependence. The “wife” must “work” to support the partnership, and often, their joint substance use.

## PEER RECRUITMENT

Peer recruitment occurs when someone who is already engaged in the commercial sex trade, either independently or with a pimp, convinces someone else to join the trade. In some circumstances, the recruiter will materially benefit from that new person’s engagement.

Since the early 1990’s, it has been understood and accepted that youth in-care in Nova Scotia are particularly at risk to be recruited, by each other, into the sex trade. Internal attempts to address and respond to the problem are ongoing, but initiatives largely remain unevaluated, and all information, data and statistics related to youth in-care are shrouded in bureaucracy. Interrupting peer recruitment among youth in-care would require the Child Welfare System to consult and collaborate with lived experience and community agencies in ways that have not yet been attempted in Nova Scotia.

Peer recruiting can also happen in school and community environments where youth gather and engage with one another. It is facilitated through peer pressure, but also as an antidote to community isolation particularly if a youth has a history of trauma or feels a sense of belonging with other marginalized groups.

## “TRICKS” AND BAD DATES

A 2015 “John Sting” that took place in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, demonstrated that there is a never-ending stream of men that are prepared to pay for sex in the community. Unfortunately, certain purchasers perpetrate violent acts against trafficking victims and independent sex workers as a part of their transaction. In our Hearing Them survey, 78% of the 95 respondents said they had experienced violence from a John at some point in their engagement (48% said the same about pimps).

Commonly referred to as “Bad Dates”, these perpetrators are rarely caught or successfully prosecuted. This is largely because police and medical first responders have biases and may subconsciously discriminate against sex trade workers and criminals. When assessing such situations, authorities must remember that the concept of consent is not simply voided when a sexual exchange is transactional in nature. The term “bad date” itself minimizes the violence and trauma of these encounters, some of which can be severe and life-threatening.

## “GROOMERS” AND CHILD SEX OFFENDERS

A “Groomer” is an adult that seeks sexual relationships with children and youth, and methodically prepares them for future sexual contact. They commit sexual offences against children or youth, both within and outside of the scope of the commercial sex industry.

Groomers can be community members or adults close to the youth who take advantage of their vulnerabilities and lack of access to basic needs such as housing or transportation for their sexual gratification. These are typically people in a position of trust or power, who manipulate the youth to believe that the exchange of sex for needs is normal.

A child under the age of 18 cannot consent to a sexual transaction. That said, a purchaser meeting with a minor to receive sexual services is considered to be committing child abuse. However, purchasers of sexual services from youth are not treated as child sex offenders as they are rarely caught or held accountable for their actions.

Possessing, producing, or purchasing intimate images of individuals under the age of

18 is a criminal offence. The public does not think about child pornography in the way that the legal system defines it. Images of dirty basements, shadowy men, and dark web channels are often elicited, but the realities are far more innocuous than that. An individual can be found to have produced child pornography simply by asking a person under the age of 18 to send them a sexual image of themselves.

## SUGAR DADDIES/MAMAS

A Sugar Daddy or Sugar Mama is someone with enough disposable income to support the lifestyle of their (usually younger) intimate companions. Sugaring and traditional sex work have many similarities. In fact, when engaged in a sugar relationship, sugar babies fulfill each required element of a sex worker: first, sexual services are offered, and second, money is obtained.

The two primary aspects that assist in differentiating sugar dating from sex work are:

- The emotional component of the relationship (ie. “companionship”) and;
- The length of the relationship.

Sugar relationships are all contractual in nature, though the basis of the arrangement differs from one to the other. There are three prominent types of sugar arrangements:

1. **The traditional sugar arrangement.** This arrangement has a “relationship” façade. The baby and the daddy/mama base their relationship on companionship. Due to its striking similarities to a “normal” relationship, these arrangements rarely face issues with the law.
2. **The pay-per-visit arrangement.** Due to the similarity of this arrangement with in and out call sexual services, where evidence permits, parties participating in this type of relationship could face issues with the law.
3. **The combination agreement.** In this type of arrangement, the sugar baby agrees to engage in a long-term sexual arrangement with little companionship. This type of arrangement allows both the baby and the daddy/mama to skirt legal implications by finding an in-between to the pay-per-visit arrangement and the traditional sugar arrangement.

Despite the exponential growth in sugaring over the past decade, we have not yet seen a matter of this kind before a judge in Canada. Legal professionals have opined that this is due to the difficulty in proving this type of case beyond a reasonable doubt. This may be because of the coded language used by sugar daters or the difficulty for law enforcement in identifying sugar daters. That said, in the meantime, prosecutors and legal scholars alike across North America continue to study this new phenomenon to better understand its implications. Intervention programs for those who purchase sexual services are prominent across Canada, however, interventions aimed at dealing with perpetrators limit themselves to the services offered by the criminal justice system after perpetrators have been identified, charged, and prosecuted.

# PERPETRATOR INTERVENTIONS

In this section, we look at the types of programs and interventions that exist across jurisdictions, as well as how Nova Scotia has historically implemented similar initiatives.

## INCARCERATION

The commercial sex trade is constantly adapting and pivoting. For example, certain provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada pertaining to the commodification of sexual services have been successfully challenged in Ontario provincial courts (Hayes, 2020) and other challenges are on their way to another Supreme Court of Canada review (Dubinski K. , 2021). With all these changes, it is important for the systemic response to also remain flexible and responsive to emergent trends and legal reforms.

**Sentences for human trafficking can range depending on a variety of factors. Although these charges do come with mandatory minimum sentences of 4 years, there have been successful constitutional challenges to this legislation**

*(DUBINSKI K. , 2018)*

Aside from policing, prosecution and incarceration, there are very few institutional interventions aimed at reducing perpetrations. Currently, financial restitution for victims is limited to material losses incurred as a result of the crime and does not include “lost wages” due to exploitative labour practices, or “pain and suffering” in cases where violence and trauma were present. If victims were able to apply for financial restitution for lost wages or pain and suffering from those who profited from them, they could use these funds to assist them in their exit and recovery.

## BAD DATE REPORTING

Bad date lists are harm-reduction tools used by sex workers and supportive agencies. Such lists contain detailed information about violent, dangerous, or unscrupulous clients. In Halifax, Nova Scotia, Stepping Stone manages a bad date list for their participants.

In February of 2021, a collective of agencies that support sex workers were awarded funding for the development of a province-wide bad-date reporting system that would include an app developed by and for sex workers to report bad dates easily and anonymously. As reported in the Vancouver Sun:

**Creating this tool is more important now than ever because of an increase in violence that sex workers are facing due to the pandemic, which has forced people to be more isolated and led to no-visitor policies in most social housing. “All of us are seeing more levels of desperation, definitely more violence,” said Beyene. And the risk is even higher for some groups in the sex industry, including Indigenous, homeless and migrant workers. Added McKee: “By increasing isolation, and decreasing access to resources, and drop-ins, and community for sex workers, perhaps has made it easier for predators to commit violent acts.**

*(CULBURT, 2021)*



## JOHN STINGS

John Sting operations consist of police officers posing as sex workers to encourage Johns to solicit sexual services. The goal of these operations is to gather evidence to support the John's arrest. Once arrested, they are charged and sentenced in accordance with the provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada.

Over the past 5 years, there has been an increase in the number of John Sting operations across Canada. Some say the "John Be Gone" sting that took place in 2015 in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, where 27 Johns were arrested over several weeks prompted a wave in operations. In 2017, the Edmonton police carried out one sting on average per week, arresting more than 294 Johns in 27 separate operations. Those numbers were up from a total of 104 arrests in 2016. In 2018, police forces across Ontario saw an increase in arrests, one operation of which took place in St. Thomas arresting 20 men over four days. Similar efforts

continued in 2019, where London and Toronto police forces arrested 5 to 7 men in one day, some days.

Though authorities say that mass John Sting operations are undertaken in the name of protecting the public and protecting women, sex workers and experts alike say that such efforts are ineffective and may in fact make conditions worse for sex workers. Put simply, the increase in society's desire to criminalize Johns causes those involved in the industry to be on edge during their interactions. This means that Johns may take roundabout ways to obtain sex, including asking sex workers to meet them in their vehicles, or even in their homes. This added pressure has also caused sex workers to rush screening questions when meeting Johns – a practice that has its own set of repercussions. The desire to mass arrest Johns may be a byproduct of a savior mentality and may in

fact be contrary to the best interests of sex workers. It is suggested that the decrease in demand for sex leaves sex workers with little to no income and consequently, in a precarious situation. In saying that, however, no one should have to engage in sex work as a survival strategy and therefore, we must all play a part in protecting vulnerable individuals from entering the sex trade as a means for survival.

## JOHN SCHOOLS

The first John School was established in San Francisco, California, in 1995 in an attempt to rehabilitate sex addicts and reduce demand for paid sex. Since then, several cities across North America have created and launched similar programs. Though great effort is put forward by organizers and attendees, there remains no solid evidence that John School is effective in rehabilitating sex addicts nor in reducing the demand for paid sex.

John Schools operate as pre-conviction diversion programs. This means that men who have been arrested for engaging in purchasing sex or attempting to purchase sex are given the opportunity to pay to partake in a one-day workshop rather than be sentenced for their crime. To pursue the workshop, Johns must first formally accept responsibility for their crime. This equates to no more than a tap on the wrist, as the one-day workshop comes and goes quicker than one can blink.

During the workshop, Johns are educated by former sex workers, social workers, and various other individuals who seek to alter their attitudes and harmful behaviours. These schools exist in all major cities across Canada, including but not limited to Vancouver, Edmonton, Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, and Saskatoon. Certain workshops are led by organizations such as the Salvation Army and the John Howard Society where others are offered directly through the criminal justice system.

Prior to the arrival of Bill C-36 (the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act), Coverdale Courtwork Society in Halifax operated a program called PEP (Prostitution Education Program) which served as a “John School” and means to divert fines from purchasers into a fund for survivors to access education programs to initiate a career change. This program and fund no longer exist.

In the United States, experts are studying what might be the future of sex buyer intervention. In the video Re-thinking John School: The Future of Sex Buyer Intervention, speaker Peter Qualliotine posits that the community at large has a role to play in lowering the demand for paid sex (Qualliotine, 2018). A study titled Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex showed that although half of the study's sample did not buy sex, most participants were tolerant of men who did (Farley, Golding, Matthews, Malamuth, & Jarrett, 2015). This suggests that initiatives launched to deter Johns must also look at engaging and educating bystanders.

Qualliotine believes that John Schools must be reinvented. Traditional John Schools are about diversion, rather than rehabilitation.

Following are a few downfalls of traditional John Schools:

- The workshop spans only one day;
- The workshop is offered in a large group setting in a lecture format;
- The workshop offers little to no small group discussion thereby limiting meaningful exchange;
- The workshop is primarily information-based.
- Have clear process-based goals. For example:
  - I. Deconstruct toxic masculinity;
  - II. Explore healthy masculinities.
- Have clear pedagogical outcomes. These would outline what Johns must know and understand by the end of the course. They would demonstrate their findings by way of evaluation. For example, participants would have to show that they understand that:

Reinvented John Schools would:

- Be held over multiple sessions. This offers Johns the ability to reflect on their discussions prior to engaging in the next session.
- Have interactive exercises. This encourages Johns to speak and be challenged on their thought patterns and behaviours.
- I. Women in sex work can be raped;
- II. Women in sex work can be harmed;
- III. It is not because they are paying for a service that the woman should do whatever they request;
- IV. Most women engaged in sex work do not freely choose to be.



## REPORT-A-JOHN

Since the arrival of Bill C-36 in 2014, police forces across the country have encouraged citizens to assist them in catching Johns. In cities across Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta, police forces have launched "Report-A-John" initiatives whereby citizens are to report potential John sightings. Some cities have gone so far as to install signs around the city indicating how to go about reporting suspicious behaviour. To report the activity, members of the public must simply fill out a form with the license plate information and vehicle description of the potential John, as well as the location, date, and time of the sighting. In an attempt to deter Johns, certain cities across Quebec will even send "Dear John" letters based on the reports submitted

by citizens informing them that they are the subject of a complaint that has been brought to the attention of authorities. By promoting Report-A-John initiatives, authorities are attempting to deter potential Johns by alerting them that they are being watched not only by the police, but by the community at large.

## MEDIA RELEASES AND SHAMING

The arrival of Bill C-36 has also prompted a movement of "outing" Johns. Several police forces across Canada have started releasing the names of Johns, a practice that was avoided in the past. This is a deterrent strategy that acts as an extension of the criminal justice system.

This shame punishment, though criticized by lay folks and academics alike, aims to communicate to the wider society that engaging in criminal behaviour is not okay.

In a survey completed amongst recovering Johns, 78.7% of participants indicated that they actively hide their sex buying from their partner and nearly all participants indicated that they actively worry about being "outed." Embarrassment, shame, and stigma were a few words used to describe how they would feel if their loved ones found out they purchased sex

*(ATCHISON, 2010)*

# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Currently in Nova Scotia, many efforts have gone into raising awareness about trafficking and exploitation with the goal of empowering people to recognize the warning signs and build resiliency against this kind of sexualized violence. While education about the tactics and behaviours that pimps use to coerce and control people is necessary and crucial in the fight against trafficking, it is a downstream approach that puts the onus on the victim to prevent being victimized.

Increased awareness and development of a systems-based reporting infrastructure has apparently had an impact on the rate of Human Trafficking in Nova Scotia between 2018 and 2019, where the rate of police-reported trafficking increased from .97 to 5.3 cases per 100,000 people

*(IBRAHIM, 2021)*

The systemic response has focused on responding to “trafficking” while very little has been invested to address violence and trauma within the larger sex industry. There are currently no community or legal responses to demand-side perpetration.

Although challenges to Bill C-36 are anticipated in the coming years, the current laws allow for intervention points with purchasers which should be leveraged. Following are examples of tools that could be implemented by service providers and/or law enforcement to assist in addressing the issue:

- Financial compensation or restitution initiatives for victims of trafficking from their pimps and perpetrators which covers financial losses and emotional distress due to being exploited or trafficked beyond the current allowances for restitution applications. Nova Scotia is currently lacking a robust victim’s fund for assisting people in moving on from their experiences and such initiatives could assist victims in their journeys away from the sex trade.
- Education and awareness of the cultural, criminal, and community implications of purchasing sexual services and intimate images, particularly from minors. In addition to targeting purchasers, these initiatives must also look at engaging and educating bystanders about the laws and potential harms of purchasing. Raising public awareness about consent and choice in the sex trade generally would assist in shifting commonly held narratives that all sex workers willingly participate in the trade and assert that consent is still required even if services have been purchased.
- Critical education with purchasers that explore healthy masculinities; deconstruct the historical and cultural influences which have normalized the commodification of sexualized bodies; and how systems of colonization, capitalism, and patriarchy intersect with exploitation and trafficking in the sex trade.
- Reinstatement of a fund like Coverdale’s PEP program, that would enable the diversion of fines collected from purchasers through the criminal justice system to programs for sex workers, victims, and survivors to access for education if they are interested in making a career change.

- A provincial bad-date reporting system is worth considering as a valuable tool for reducing potential harm from violence that can occur in the commercial sex trade from purchasers. This would be an invaluable investment in people's health and safety. Such a reporting system should be designed and developed by active sex workers and the agencies that support them. A provincial system would assist in reaching communities in rural Nova Scotia and could be implemented as a harm-reduction tool with youth who are entrenched, regardless of if they use services or not.
- Further education of law enforcement bodies on concepts such as "Bad Dates." Relationships between the police and sex trade workers are typically strained because their primary experiences with police have been as offenders. When sex trade workers come to the police as victims, responses from police are troubling. Our recent Hearing Them survey gave us a glimpse at how unsafe

police are for adult, gender, and racially diverse sex workers. Sex Workers do not feel safe to report violent offenders to the police because when they do they often experience shame, blame and occasionally coercion, by the police. If respect and relationships can be built between police and adult independent sex workers, violent offenders, who are also purchasing sexual services from children and youth, can be better identified and held accountable for the sexual violence they have perpetrated.

Service providers and members of the community alike must also brainstorm similar systemic strategies aimed at assisting us in identifying individuals who commit sexual offences against children, particularly those who work with children and youth directly or hold prominent positions of power in the community.

It can be difficult to examine and understand the various ways sexual predators in our community work and operate. For some, it is hard to fathom that such disturbing things are happening to our children and youth right under our noses. We cannot allow this discomfort to cause problem-blindness or prevent us from moving forward on strategies to address perpetration that go beyond incarcerating perpetrators. We must be able to comfortably address and intervene both on the supply and the demand sides of commercial sexual exploitation.

Ultimately, we must be brave to identify sexual predators and we must be creative in how we respond to them. Interventions provided by the criminal justice system will only reach a small fraction of the perpetrators in our society. We must develop holistic approaches that address perpetrators, as well as reframe our cultural narratives to destigmatize those engaged in the industry.

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