



Centre Métropolis du Québec Immigration et métropoles

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CAPSULE RECHERCHE

Santé et services sociaux, sécurité publique, justice – Phase II

VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CANADIAN COMMUNITY SECTOR

Keywords: Health, social services, immigration, justice, human rights

SUMMARY

Trafficking in persons is a global problem, with most sources estimating the number of victims worldwide at approximately two million (UNESCO, 2004). Due to its clandestine nature, however, it is often overlooked or poorly understood by both policy-makers and the public. For this project, a working definition was developed from the definition in the United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons* (United Nations, 2000), which identifies trafficking in persons as an activity that “involves the recruitment, transportation or harbouring of persons for the purpose of exploitation, and may occur across or within borders. Traffickers use various methods to maintain control over their victims, including force and threats of violence.”

This project focuses on both international and domestic trafficking. It examines Canada as a source, destination and/or transit country. The emphasis is on trafficking in persons as a human rights issue as well as a gender issue. The objectives of this research project are to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics and the needs of victims of trafficking, as well as to document the community-based services that currently exist for victims and any gaps that may exist in these services.

METHODOLOGY

The research was undertaken between January and May 2005 in four sites: Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal, destinations or transit points for most people trafficked into or within Canada (RCMP, 2005). Telephone interviews were conducted with 40 front-line workers having first hand experience working with victims of trafficking. They represent a broad range of service providers: victim services, immigrant and refugee settlement services, community social rights groups, religious organizations, women’s organizations, Aboriginal and ethnic organizations. Content analysis was performed horizontally and vertically using open coding to identify emerging themes and patterns and to create categories of analysis.

At each site, a set of issues concerning trafficking in persons was addressed, including: (1) the characteristics of trafficking in persons as encountered by the frontline organisations; (2) victims’ needs in terms of prevention and protection; (3) agencies’ responses to trafficking, and (4) identification of gaps and barriers in provision of services.

FINDINGS

The findings from the four research sites reveal many similarities, but also important differences and specificities in terms of the particular ways in which the

trafficking issue is approached and the most current responses to it.

Most respondents use working definitions that are consistent with one or more aspects of the definition of the UN Protocol on Trafficking. Consensus exists among agencies about the most important needs of victims in the short and long term, and all sites observe that many of these needs are currently not being met or being met only through ad hoc arrangements.

Respondents across the country noted that the conditions for trafficking are created by socio-structural factors both in Canada and in developing countries, including poverty, the feminization of poverty, and lack of economic opportunities. Agencies also tended to agree that the most significant obstacles to service provision included a lack of funding for community groups, a lack of immigration status for the victims, language and cultural barriers, the marginalization and isolation of trafficking victims, victims' fear of deportation or retaliation by the traffickers, and the secrecy and silence surrounding the issue of trafficking in persons. The lack of information on trafficking in persons, or the accuracy of the available information, is also identified by respondents as a significant obstacle to the provision of services.

Differences between the sites are observed in terms of demographics of victims, responses of agencies, and specific issues that need to be addressed for the better provision of services.

Particularly striking among the findings is the young age of many trafficking victims and the prevalence of trafficking of Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. The extent of the trafficking networks operating in Canada was startling in terms of both the high level of organization and the magnitude of trafficking; respondents described networks which cross the continent and include major metropolitan centres in both Canada and the US, but also extend north into smaller Canadian towns in British Columbia and the Prairie provinces.

Many of the respondents had never directly considered trafficking within Canadian borders as an issue, inasmuch as the population they serve comes for the most part from outside Canada. Given that Aboriginal people were one of the target populations of this

study, special focus was accorded to them. The difficult socio-economic situation of Aboriginal people is reflected in this study's finding that the majority of people trafficked within Canada are Aboriginal women and children. Another disturbing finding is that children constitute the most vulnerable population, and that they are the ones most difficult to reach since they are usually confined within homes or other closed environments.

The respondents in this study have indicated specific needs that must be addressed if solutions and preventative and protective measures are to be effective. The secrecy surrounding trafficking, the illegal movement of people, the relationship to organized crime and new criminal networks within and outside Canada provide some indication of the depth of the problem.

A grave human rights violation, trafficking in persons involves the utilization of threat or false promises to force or coerce people, predominantly women and children, into exploitative situations and conditions of extreme suffering. Many respondents have called for more policies and programs that emphasize protection of victims in addition to recognizing the needs and human rights of victims.

CONTRIBUTION TO POLICY MAKING

This study was commissioned by the Department of Justice Canada. It is one of the few studies of its kind in the country. The researchers hope that it will constitute a meaningful contribution to long-term policy development in the area of protecting the rights of trafficking victims and ensuring that gender issues are considered within any policy framework.

L'équipe de recherche

- Jacqueline Oxman-Martinez, Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur la violence familiale et la violence faite aux femmes (CRI-VIFF), Université de Montréal
- Marie Lacroix, Service social, Université de Montréal
- Jill Hanley, Stagiaire post-doctorale, GERME, Bruxelles

Partenaire associé au projet

- Ministère de la Justice, Division de la recherche et de la statistique

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PUBLICATIONS on line

Oxman-Martinez, J., Lacroix, M., and Hanley, J. (2005). *Victims of Trafficking in Persons: Perspectives from the Canadian Community Sector*, Research report, Department of Justice, Research and Statistics Division, 47 p.

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http://international.metropolis.net/research-policy/World/World%20Bulletin_vol4_e.pdf. Version française : « Une mission internationale : le protocole visant à prévenir, réprimer et punir la traite des personnes, en particulier des femmes et des enfants » [http://im.metropolis.net/actualites/Une%20mission%20internationale\(2\).pdf](http://im.metropolis.net/actualites/Une%20mission%20internationale(2).pdf)

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Centre Métropolis du Québec
Immigration et métropoles
INRS – Centre Urbanisation Culture Société
385, rue Sherbrooke Est
Montréal, QC Canada H2X 1E3
Téléphone : 514.499.4084
Courriel : im-metropolis@umontreal.ca