



Sex Trafficking: A Treaty #3 Perspective

To the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs,

Grand Council Treaty #3 is submitting this brief on Sex-Trafficking to express concerns pertaining to the limited data collected on trafficking within Canada, the lack of available services in Treaty #3 for victims of trafficking, and the limited funding available for First Nations to develop interventions.

Sex trafficking is a concern in Treaty #3. There are several factors that place citizens at higher risk. Approximately half of its citizens live on-reserve, many of which remain remote/semi-remote. Personal testimonies have highlighted that police services can take hours to arrive at a community. Having such large delays in services may result in individuals not turning to them when in need. Although remote, Treaty #3 First Nations are surrounded by busy these communities are found within close proximity to international borders, interprovincial borders and the TransCanada Highway. The region also has large mining and resource extraction activities. These factors place members of communities at high risk for exploitation and trafficking.

Quantitative data and statistics are limited, but in its work with consultants in 2019 GCT#3 and Binesiweg Centre for Wellness conducted a lived experience survey on human trafficking. Surveys and personal testimonies from this period of work identified an alarming number of respondents that indicated involvement with trafficking. A 2018 homelessness enumeration report for Rainy River district found that 35% of its respondents indicated that they had felt forced into doing something they were not comfortable with. OPP constables interviewed for a safe house proposal by GCT#3 also indicated that a lack of safe housing often resulted in women facing trafficking having prolonged hotel stays waiting for beds to open up. This increased the likelihood that these women would return to their traffickers.

Any strategy to address human trafficking needs to be informed history of colonialism and First Nations within the province and responsive to the calls for justice within the MMIWG final report. A human trafficking strategy should also be proactive by providing Indigenous governments and communities with adequate financial resources, health and social supports as identified in the final report of the MMIWG inquiry; Reclaiming Power and Place.

Effective strategies must also recognize the laws and work already done within First Nations of Treaty #3 and Ontario. In June, 2011, Grand Council Treaty#3 Leadership passed a resolution addressing human trafficking within their territory. This resolution stands to promote ongoing partnerships with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs "Stand Strong" Prevent Human Trafficking: Stop the Sexual Exploitation of First Nations People, Grandmothers Protecting our Children Group and Tracia's Trust. Grand Council Treaty #3 and the Grand Council Treaty #3 Women's Executive Council have taken a leadership position in developing a strategy towards human trafficking within the region. The Grand Council Treaty #3 Women's Executive Council would also like to highlight that Treaty #3 territory spans both Manitoba and Ontario and borders the State of Minnesota. Any effective strategy within this territory will require partnership and collaboration between the governments, police forces, border agents and front line service providers within these provinces/states.

Sex trafficking remains a well-known, but poorly reported and quantified issue within Canada. Limited funding continues to negatively impact First Nations' capacity to support meaningful and locally relevant

initiatives that would promote healing and foster more secure, safe communities. Too often, available funding comes in the form of short-term grants with a focus on macro-level initiatives that can leave First Nations with underfunded and unsustainable programming.

Human trafficking has been an area that the women's council has been advocating in for decades, with limited outside jurisdictional support. Currently, the Grand Council Treaty #3 Women's Executive Council has developed a safe house plan, Ogimaakwe Ka Ki No Igenwin. This plan is based in the calls for justice within the MMIWG final report and will support First Nation women and girls safely leave sexual exploitation. However, this initiative requires sustainable resources to provide a safe location, salaries, and resources for programming. A federal response should identify ways that can grass roots initiatives like this can be supported, ensuring Indigenous victims of human trafficking have a culturally safe place to turn too.