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| A person walking down a dirt road  Description automatically generated  Human Sex Trafficking in Waterloo Region  The Chelsea’s Story project  A report and analysis of activities, feedback and action | Summary  During the winter of 2019, 1,135 people learned about human sex trafficking in Waterloo Region. Initiated through a unique community partnership*,* the **Chelsea’s Story** project and this report acknowledge the increases in human sex trafficking in our region, and urges a rapid response from educators, lawmakers and the community at large.  Lori-Ann Livingston and Jessica Wood with support from WRCPC staff |



Written August 2019 for the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council.

For more information, contact JThompson@regionofwaterloo.ca

On July 30, 2019

Jill Dunlop, Associate Minister of Children and Women’s Issues,

issued the following statement:

speechbubbleToday, on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, I want to draw attention to the unfortunate prevalence of human trafficking across Ontario. […] Human trafficking robs the safety, livelihood and dignity of those who are being exploited and abused. Survivors face tremendous obstacles in leaving their traffickers, healing from their trauma and establishing a healthy life. Today, and always, we must shed light on this appalling crime by talking about it openly. We don’t often think something so terrible can happen close to our homes, but the reality is occurrences of sex trafficking are higher in Ontario than in any other province […] speechbubbleright

Human sex trafficking in Waterloo Region

Human sex trafficking is the sale of humans for sex. It involves deceit, force, coercion and control of a person by threats of emotional, mental and sometimes physical violence for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced commercial sex. This includes forced prostitution and sexual performance including exotic dancing and the production of pornography.

Ontario has the highest level of human sex trafficking in Canada, with an estimated 70% of all human trafficking activities taking place in this province (Stats Can 2016). Waterloo region has become attractive to trafficking because of the ease by which sex traffickers can transport victims over the 400 series of highways. Human sex trafficking is hard to track and is largely going undetected and under-reported.

Human sex trafficking is not sex work which is a consensual transaction between adults. Human sex trafficking is not the same as human smuggling which is the illegal service of bringing people into the country unlawfully.

**Who is at Risk?**

Sex trafficking is the organized sexual abuse of children and others who are vulnerable for profit. The 2 biggest factors for becoming a victim are gender and age ( Canadian Women’s Foundation 2014). 93% of victims of human trafficking are female; 70% of whom are under the age of 25 (Stats Can 2016). The average age of recruitment is 13-14 years old ( Canadian Women’s Foundation 2014).

Although anyone could potentially fall victim to traffickers, those from the more vulnerable groups in our society tend to be at a higher risk. In Canada, these groups include Indigenous women; youth and children; migrants and new immigrants; teen runaways, and children in protective custody, along with other marginalized groups (Government of Canada 2017).

Victims of human sex trafficking can be lured through false job offers or promises of love, romance, independence or hopes for a better life. The process of a victim being lured into being trafficked for sex can be as short as 24 hours or span over the course of months. Victims often don’t even realize that they are being manipulated or “groomed”.

By its nature, human trafficking is difficult to measure and cases are grossly under-reported. However, we do know that sex trafficking is on the rise in Canada and between 2013 and 2014 alone, the rate of human trafficking violations nearly doubled (Peel Institute on Violence Prevention 2018).

# **Some of the Factors at Play**

Several factors contribute to the existence of human sex trafficking. These include gender, economics, access through technology and social media, and the flourishing demand for paid sex with minors.

As mentioned, the vast majority of victims are female. Conversely most traffickers are male with 66% being young men age 18 to 34 (Stats Can 2016). In Canada, the estimated average profits from one victim of sex trafficking are about $280,800/year (Canadian Woman's Foundation n.d.). Although it is unclear just how prevalent sex trafficking is in Canada, it is estimated to be in the billions of dollars in the United States. Not only is human sex trafficking lucrative it is relatively low risk for those profiting from it.

Sex trafficking is driven by demand. Many youth and children are thought to be lured into the sex trade because the growing demand for sex services across the United States offers access to normalized, promoted commercial sex. Research indicates this culture of tolerance is shaped by the “culture that glamorizes pimping and prostitution.”

Technology facilitates easy access to children and youth even when we think they are safe, and it facilitates the sale and promotion of sex while protecting anonymity.

Our report urges a rapid response from educators, governments, lawmakers and the community at large to address and respond to these facts while investigating some of upstream approaches to preventing human sex trafficking altogether.

# **The Chelsea’s Story project**

In response to the growing prevalence of human sex trafficking, The Waterloo Crime Prevention Council (WRCPC) forged a unique partnership with JM Drama of the Registry Theatre and the Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASCWR). WRCPC worked to secure the rights for the British play **Chelsea’s Story** and it was adapted for a Waterloo audience. The production became the centrepiece for a series of outreach and educational opportunities about human sex trafficking in Waterloo region in 2019.

**Chelsea’s Story** was written by Sean McGrath from Alter Ego Creative Solutions in the UK for people as young as 12 to understand what trafficking is about and the ways in which those who are vulnerable, particularly girls and young women tend to be targeted and groomed.

**Chelsea’s Story** is based on a true story. It centres on a group of three students who discover the diary of a 15-year-old girl named Chelsea, who is targeted and groomed by her boyfriend to be trafficked for sex. Chelsea’s diary is examined by the three students, who, along with their teacher, attempt to understand what happened to her. The play is followed by a facilitated talkback session which unpacks elements of trafficking and exploitation including; what makes a relationship healthy or unhealthy, safe internet use and sexting, consent, the grooming process and where to go for help. For adults the play also raises awareness of the warning signs of exploitation of children and youth and a better understanding of the insidious and damaging nature of manipulation.

speechbubble AlterEgo’s **Chelsea's Story** is an innovative and powerful production highlighting the very serious and emotional issue of child sexual exploitation. The production shows how young people, boys and girls, are groomed by adults for the purpose of sexual exploitation using various methods, ensnaring young people and eventually taking complete control and dominating their whole lives. The audience will gain a better understanding of the devastating impact that sexual exploitation has on a young person's life. This is a very useful and innovative way of raising awareness of the issues relating to sexual exploitation and reaching young people, giving them some skills and knowledge to be able to protect themselves from this form of abuse.  speechbubbleright

Sheila Taylor, National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People, UK

During his visit to Waterloo Region, the playwright Sean McGrath commented that in Canada we are seemingly still trying to convince people that human sex trafficking is an issue which is different to the UK where due to several high profile cases, the public is well aware it is an issue and is demanding significant action. As a result this production has been seen by thousands of professionals and more than 950,000 young people throughout the UK.

## What were our goals?

The **Chelsea’s Story** project strived to increase awareness of human sex trafficking and to mobilize the community and its services to prevent our children and youth from becoming victims. We used**Chelsea’s Story** to encourage a broader dialogue on human sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, including:

1. Awareness of what human sex trafficking is;
2. Awareness that it is growing in Waterloo region;
3. Strategies to recognize sexual exploitation and trafficking in personal relationships, as well as opportunities to stay safe or intervene
4. Develop knowledge of community resources available through local agencies and advocacy groups;

**Chelsea’s Story** was augmented by a series of outreach and educational events during Human Trafficking Awareness Week in February 2019. To support a focus on reaching children aged 12-15 and youth and others at risk, there was broader engagement of educators, parents and the general public through pre- and post- performance activities. In addition to these events an active social media campaign to build awareness support the performances and educational activities.

The Chelsea’s Story Working Group Working Committee was made up of Christiane Sadeler and Julie Thompson from the WRCPC, Sam Varteniuk from JM Drama, Lawrence McNaught from the registry Theatre and TK Prichard and Nicky Carswell from SASCWR

The results

925 people saw **Chelsea’s Story** performed at:

* The Grand Valley Institution for Women (Kitchener’s Federal Prison for Women) , Feb. 13;
* The Registry Theatre, five shows - Feb. 21-24;
* To 450 grade 7&8 students at William G. Davis senior public school in Cambridge, Feb. 22;
* For the Meeting Professionals Against Human Trafficking (MPAHT) at a hospitality industry conference, April 9 in Toronto.

Each **Chelsea’s Story** performance included powerful “talk-back” opportunities facilitated in a conversational style by SASCWR staff to unpacked the main themes of the play. The talk backs were passionate and diverse. The performance at the school was particularly remarkable with the students fully engaged, asking many questions and sharing ideas. Many students suggested that **Chelsea’s Story** be shown in all the schools across Waterloo region.

## Associated activities

In addition to **Chelsea’s Story**, a film screening of Very Young Girls and panel discussion were hosted on Feb. 11, at the Kitchener Public Library. Over 175 people attended the event which was moderated by Brenda Halloran included a panel consisting of Tricia Holmes– Crown Attorney’s office, Nicky Carswell –Anti-human trafficking support coordinator, TK Pritchard –Male Allies program SASCWR, Heather Horn – Family and Children’s Services WR, D/Cst. Matt Demarte -Waterloo Regional Police Service - Human Trafficking division.

The WRCPC, SASCWR and JM Drama developed several resources to accompany all the talk-backs and events including:

1. A research and planning **(RAP) sheet** on human sex trafficking (attached);
2. **R.E.S.E.T.** (Recognizing Exploitation: A Syllabus to End Trafficking) A curriculum and teaching toolkit for teaching Grade 7-9 students developed by SASCWR (attached);
3. **Human Sex Trafficking and the Kitchener-Waterloo Region’s Perceptions**: A Thematic Analysis (attached below);
4. **Infographic** on the Chelsea’s Story project (attached);
5. A **performance program** which includes information on human sex trafficking for the audiences(attached);
6. Draft **annual communications plan** for raising awareness about human sex trafficking (attached);
7. DRAFT **Mini Tactical Plan** for the community engagement of Chelsea’s Story (see attached)
8. A **poster contest** for middle school and high school students (see attached);

## There is strength in community

The **Chelsea’s Story** project was initiated through a unique partnership between local arts, social services, advocacy groups, community members and local government through the Crime Prevention Council.

Funded by the KW Community Foundation and 2 local law firms; the Morneau Family Law and PK Law. It also leveraged significant in-kind contributions and volunteer hours from across the region. The production, and indeed all of the associated events, couldn’t have succeeded without this committed volunteer support. The entire cast of the play volunteered their time and talent to make **Chelsea’s Story** a true community theatre production. And 16 year old Jacy Morneau won the **Kitchener Youth Action Council's Award for Arts and Culture** for her role as volunteer stage manager.

A Community Engagement Committee comprised of a passionate group of volunteers from the school board, crown’s office, family and children services, a parent association and locale human sex trafficking advocates and experts facilitated complimentary activities and creatively engaged diverse audiences. Councilor Tom Galloway, Chair of WRCPC Shayne Turner, Regional Chair Karen Redman, and Chief Bryan Larkin introduced several of the shows.

The multi faceted nature of the events led by these collaborative efforts accessed and attracted a diverse overall audience many of whom would not normally have attended a theatre production.

Members of the Community Engagement Committee were:

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| MEMBERS |  |
| Lori Loft: | * Grade 7&8 teacher, currently teaching core subjects with experience teaching in phys. ed and health |
| Heather Horn | * Family and Child Services (FACS) * Parent council at middle and high schools |
| Sandy Biback | * Meeting Professionals Against Human Trafficking |
| Patricia Moore | * Crown Attorney * A WRCPC member |
| Julie Thompson | * WRCPC staff |
| Lori-Ann Livingston | * Writer and communications professional |
| Sara Velasquez: | * UW Green House Project on Sex Trafficking * Organizer of Walk for Freedom KW |
| Jennifer Lucking | * Restoration Second Stage Homes, a residence for survivors of sex trafficking. |
| Meaghan Martin | * Sleep Tight, a campaign to collect new pajamas to distribute to people in need in Waterloo Region |

## Community Feedback

Over the course of the performances of **Chelsea’s Story**, 396 participants filled out the evaluation surveys. This included 20 inmates from GVI, 206 students and staff from a middle school, and 170 participants from the volunteers and the Registry Theatre performances. In addition, all events that were followed by talk backs included participant observations and data were collated into themes, along with feedback from participants, presenters and organizers. This thematic analysis is also attached at the end of this report.

The results from the production, associated events, the talk-backs and surveys indicate an overwhelming number of people do not understand that human sex trafficking is present here in Waterloo Region. Themes that emerged through completed surveys and the talk-back discussions pointed out new avenues by which to educate the population, and fostering further education through changes in language, support, government funding and laws.

A key theme that emerged from the follow-up surveys conducted at each performance and event is the necessity of embedding information about human sex trafficking into the public education system. Many in the audiences who viewed **Chelsea’s Story** agreed that the current Ontario curriculum for sex education does not properly equip the next generation, especially where human sex trafficking is concerned.

Conclusions

Although the perception is that human sex trafficking involves international kidnappings, in reality, it is happening to our children here in the region. Furthermore growing demand and ready access through social media puts all children at risk. Sex trafficking is one of the many forms of sexual assault and child abuse. It involves an industry of people who organize and provide access to coerced sex to the many people who want to purchase it. Equipping children and youth with the knowledge and skills to resist, and the tools to identify manipulation and grooming methods is vitally important.

The focus of the two different educational platforms, **Very Young Girls and Chelsea’s Story** was to build awareness of human sex trafficking in the Kitchener Waterloo area. Among the challenges of raising awareness of human sex trafficking to the wider community is that many Canadians do not recognize human sex trafficking as a problem. Further, residents of Waterloo Region do not understand the prevalence of it here. The general population must first be educated, because it simply is not enough to just focus on educating youth and potential victims. **Chelsea’s Story** aimed to make a first step towards a more general effort to raise awareness about this issue. In addition, new language must be formed around romantic relationships and consent and the lines between human sex trafficking and sex work should be better defined and taught. Targets like marginalized populations and youth need more support so they are better educated and can feel empowered to make steps in prevention. Government involvement and funding is key in this.

Next steps

There is momentum to develop a professional tour of **Chelsea’s Story** in 2021. Funding is in place and Director Pam Patel has offered to make the play an MT Space project. There is also interest from other communities should the professional tour become reality.

The primary audience would be the school boards; while it is helpful to draw on established relationships with teachers at specific schools, it is challenging to lay a strong foundation where the play and/or the toolkit and curriculum are embraced by the school board and offered to all schools. Feedback from the audiences clearly point to the need to continue efforts to raise awareness and to work towards greater inclusion of upstream solutions.

To make this tour viable a commitment from the school board(s) for the play to come into the schools would be an ideal outcome. The **Chelsea Story** partners are working on a strategy to more actively engage schools in order for the play to reach its primary target audience ensuring a tour is viable.

The **R.E.S.E.T**. (Recognizing Exploitation: a Syllabus to End Trafficking) Curriculum will be implemented in the schools. This four-part curriculum for educators will provide the necessary information, tools and resources to discuss human trafficking with young people. The curriculum contains information on vulnerability, healthy and unhealthy relationships, social media safety, exploitation and more. Suitable for grades 7 and up contact SASC for details.

The community engagement committee will reconvene to plan public awareness events and activities for February 2020, for example, a film screening and panel discussion – These activities will be supported by a social media campaign, to continue to build public awareness.

A final thought:

Currently, our responses to human sex trafficking in Canada are limited to addressing the issue after the harm has happened through rescue; treatment for trauma, addiction, mental health or pregnancy support as well as enforcement and/or incarceration. Most of the focus is on victims and on preventing victimization through awareness raising with those who are most vulnerable. This is important work. However, the project partners believe that we need to go further upstream and address the demand for sex with children and others who are vulnerable is a primary driver for human sex trafficking.

* We must confront and eliminate the root causes of violence so future generations of women, children and everyone in the province, are safe to live their lives free from the threat of fear, exploitation and violence. speechbubbleright

Jill Dunlop, Associate Minister of Children and Women’s Issues; July 2019

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Analysis (see pages 9-16)

Human Sex Trafficking and the Kitchener-Waterloo Region’s Perceptions:

A Thematic Analysis

*By Jessica Wood*

Introduction

Human trafficking is often referred to as the modern-day form of slavery. Public Safety Canada describes human trafficking as the “recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or exercising control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in order to exploit that person, typically through sexual exploitation or forced labour” (Public Safety Canada, 2018). The process for a victim being lured into this situation can be as short as 24 hours or span over the course of months. Victims often don’t even realize that they are slowly being manipulated, as traffickers often “groom” them using gifts, attention and, in some cases, drugs (Public Safety Canada, 2018). This term is sometimes confused with human smuggling. However, human smuggling is defined by the Canadian government as “the illegal migration of an individual, for profit and with the individual’s consent” (2-Statistics Canada, 2018).

It is evident that, in Canada, women, children and men are all targets for trafficking. But the unfortunate truth is that most victims are women and girls (Government of Canada, 2017). Those most likely to be at-risk include women and girls that are socially or economically disadvantaged. In Canada, these groups include Indigenous women, youth and children, migrants and new immigrants, teen runaways, and children in protective custody along with many more marginalized groups (Government of Canada, 2017). More than half of all human trafficking incidents also involve another offence with 58% of secondary violations being prostitution offences and 20% being sexual violations (2-Statistics Canada, 2018). However, by its very nature, human trafficking is difficult to measure. So, cases often go grossly underreported. There is a strong possibility that these statistics aren’t getting the complete picture.

Sex trafficking is the trafficking of an individual with the sole purpose of causing the victim to commit a commercial sex act (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d.) (Shared Hope International, n.d.). Shared Hope International defines a commercial sex act as including prostitution, pornography and sexual performance done in exchange for any item of value, such as money, drugs, shelter, food or clothes (Shared Hope International, n.d.). Sex trafficking is often confused with sex work. However, it is intent behind the commercial sex act. In the case of a human sex trafficking victim, they do not have a choice and are forced to commit sex acts for the profit of others. Sex workers voluntarily commit commercial sex (Segura, 2010).

The common age for a victim to enter sex trafficking is between nine and 17 years old (Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative, 2017). Sex traffickers often target this vulnerable group because they are too young to fully understand what is happening to them. The naivety and inability of young girls to recognize the risks their choices pose to daily life makes them easy prey for traffickers and pimps (London’s Abused Women’s Centre, 2018). Sometimes young girls and women may experience conflict and experimentation where they draw away from friends, family and teachers which can lead to them want to escape the life they have and try new things (London’s Abused Women’s Centre, 2018).

Canada has unfortunately seen a rise in human sex trafficking. Between 2013 and 2014 alone, the rate of human trafficking violations nearly doubled (Peel Institute on Violence Prevention Human Trafficking in Canada, Ontario, and Peel 2018). This growing problem has found a home specifically in Ontario which has the highest population, accounting for approximately 38.6% of the total Canadian population in 2017 (1-Statistics Canada, 2018). It is also home to the highest level of human sex trafficking. It is estimated that 70% of all human trafficking activities in the country happen in Ontario (Kitchener Public Library, n.d.). This is thought to be because of the large population residing in Ontario and the ease of which sex traffickers can transport victims over the Highway 401 (*Waterloo Region Record*, 2012).

Youth sex trafficking is likely perpetuated by to “culture of tolerance” that supports a flourishing sex trafficking market. Research has found that this culture of tolerance has found a home in the United States and is shaped by the “culture that glamorizes pimping and prostitution (Kotrla, 2014). Many youth and children are thought to be lured into the sex trade business as a consequence of the growing demand for sex services created by the normalization and promotion of commercial sex across the United States.

This critical matter often goes overlooked and underreported because many people view this as an international issue. But, in fact, domestic trafficking makes up the majority of all trafficking in Canada. It is estimated that only 7% of all trafficking is international (Joy Smith Foundation, n.d.). Many Canadian citizens remain unaware of the dangers of sex trafficking not only to their country, but to their loved ones as this issue continues to become more prevalent.

Many people are unaware of the dangers of human sex trafficking in their communities. However, it is on the rise and can no longer be overlooked. In the Waterloo Region alone, 27 counts of human sex trafficking were found in 2015 (Waterloo Regional Police, 2017). This unfortunately only represents a fraction of the problem as crimes related to human sex trafficking are often greatly underreported. This is due to multiple factors including quick movement of the victims between jurisdictions, reporting as domestic violence rather than as human sex trafficking and the shift to the online market.

This article offers some recent data regarding public perceptions of human sex trafficking in the Kitchener Waterloo area using of two different presentation forms. The first is the documentary *Very Young Girls,* directed by David Schisgall and Nina Alvarez (“*Very Young Girls* (2007) - IMDb,” n.d.). The second presentation form was done through the play **Chelsea’s Story** written by Sean McGrath and directed by Pam Patel. *Very Young Girls* is a documentary that follows the stories of prostitutes residing in New York City’s Girls Education and Mentoring Services or ‘GEMS’. The title accurately reflects the ages of these victims who started at an average age of 13 years old. Throughout the course of the film, viewers see these victims at different stages in their recovery as they struggle to escape their previous life. The strength of this film is the accurate depiction of the psychological manipulation that plagues the victims and the monumental barriers they must overcome to succeed. **Chelsea’s Story** tells the story of three students who find a diary of a 15-year-old girl called Chelsea. They reenact the falling out she has with her friends and loved ones and how she is lured into a toxic relationship with an older man as she rebels against the better judgement of her close connections. Gary then manipulates her into becoming a prostitute for him. This play is geared towards 13-14-year-old adolescents as an attempt to start conversation and educate the next generation. **Chelsea’s Story** is currently a popular educational piece in the UK along with other plays written by Sean McGrath.

This paper aims to understand people’s perceptions on human sex trafficking in the Waterloo Region through the educational platforms **Very Young Girls and Chelsea’s Story**.

Data Collection Process

This six-month project was designed to illuminate Region of Waterloo public perceptions on human sex trafficking through the presentation of **Very Young Girls and Chelsea’s Story**. These media forms were intended to educate the public and provide an opportunity for them to ask questions through a scheduled ‘talk-back’ at the end of each presentation. This information was gathered through multiple sources from a variety of demographics to gain an accurate depiction of the perceptions people hold. The sources to gather information included a survey developed by the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council team and through the manual recording of main ideas in the “talk-backs.”

*Very Young Girls* was presented to the public at the Kitchener Waterloo Library as an initial trial run of the talk-back setup and to create public interest in the production of **Chelsea’s Story**. **Chelsea’s Story** was presented to a variety of key groups including the Grand Valley Institution for Women, a secondary school, to the public through the Registry Theatre and to the Meeting Professionals Against Human Trafficking (MPAHT) showing of **Chelsea’s Story** located in Toronto, ON. It was important to the production team of **Chelsea’s Story** that it be shown to a diverse selection of audiences to understand the impact of the play on different viewers.

The talk-backs at the end of each presentation gave the viewers time to absorb the information they learned and debrief after viewing such intense and disturbing content. These sessions were facilitated by experts in their fields. For **Very Young Girls**, this included an expert panel of five individuals, including Tricia Holmes of the Crown Attorney’s office in Waterloo; two members of the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region (SASC); a member of the Family and Children’s Services Waterloo Region, and a key detective from the Waterloo Region Police Service who had much experience with human sex trafficking cases. For the showings of **Chelsea’s Story***,* a more conversational approach was taken so two charismatic members of SASC facilitated the talk-backs. This included the lead of the Male Allies program and the head support worker of the Anti-Human Trafficking unit.

The survey was developed using a mixed methods format that included quantitative questions about the participants’ overall impression of the presentations and qualitative questions asking about what they took away. These questions included “What do you think might prevent human trafficking?” and “Please share any comments. What did you enjoy about the event? What did you find most memorable? Do you have any suggestions for improvements? Do you have any ideas for future events?” These questions were written in an approachable, conversational way to spark an open dialogue with the participant and encourage them to spend time writing a response.

Paper copies of the surveys were then dispersed to each participant that viewed **Very Young Girls and Chelsea’s Story***,* with the exception of the middle school, which developed its own process for dispersing the surveys through an electronic format. All the data was then recorded into spreadsheets and organized by the time, date and location of each presentation. This was particularly important in the case of **Chelsea’s Story** as there were multiple shows per day held at the Registry Theatre. The talk-backs were each documented through manual notetaking of the primary researcher. The same researcher was used to record every talk-back to ensure that the same standard and level of understanding and to prevent inconsistent data. Each question asked by the audience members was recorded and then main points of the following discussion were tracked to ensure that the themes of each presentation were accurately translated into the research.

Results

Over the course of the performances of **Chelsea’s Story***,* 396 participants filled out the surveys after the show was completed. This included 20 GVI residents; 206 students and staff from a middle school, and 170 participants from the volunteers and the Registry Theatre performances. Audience members were given the option to self-describe their gender and for the purposes of this report, those who identified as non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer or who preferred not to specify were captured under the “Alternate Options” category.

A vast majority of participants were female; there were 255 females, 129 males, and 17 alternate options (non-binary, trans, or did not share). This may be due to several factors, but a likely influence is that victims of human sex trafficking are predominantly female. To balance these results, it is recommended that the role men play is highlighted to the community. This would ensure that men also play an important role in addressing human sex trafficking and the sexual violence culture.

Table I: Total Number of Participants Broken Down by Age and Gender

The surveys showed overwhelming support from every group monitored. On the survey, each participant was asked to rank their experience out of the categories: poor, OK, good and very good. The children at the middle school were asked to rate their experience from 1 to 4 with 1 being poor, 2 being OK, 3 being good and 4 being very good. A total of 366 out of 396 participants ranked the play as either ‘good or very good.’ Of that, a total of participants ranked the play as being ‘very good.’ From this data, it is inferred that the viewing of the play was a real success and most viewed it as a positive experience.

Table II: Participant Views of **Chelsea’s Story** collected from completed surveys

Discussion

**Chelsea’s Story** acted as a facilitator to conversation regardless of the audience. The talk-backs helped spark the debate while the surveys gave participants who did not have a chance to share and a place to voice their opinions. From all the feedback that was given, several key themes emerged.

*“Popping the Bubble”*

One of the strongest themes emerging from the feedback of **Chelsea’s Story** is that many people do not understand human sex trafficking is actually a local problem, not an international one. There is a common misconception that almost all human sex trafficking happens in other countries and that the victims are abducted and forced into slave labor when, most of the time, this is not the case. Unfortunately, this problem has found a home in Ontario and spread to small communities like the Kitchener-Waterloo region. The overwhelming amount of feedback stated that it is crucial that the “bubble is popped” so that people understand that their communities are not safe from the truly terrifying reality of human sex trafficking.

A participant from opening night stated on their survey: “Better education. Young students need to be as informed as possible to better protect themselves. Schools never provided me this kind of information. I was lucky enough to have a mother that did provide it. Not everyone is so lucky” (survey participant, Registry Theatre opening night). It is crucial that awareness is promoted in the community so that the next generation is raised knowing the dangers they face. Another participant stated in their comments on the Friday night show, “This message really needs to be told everywhere, totally shocked this is happening” (survey participant, Registry Theatre, Friday night performance).

*Shifting Structural Barriers to Empower Youth*

**Chelsea’s Story** was written to specifically educate youth on the dangers of human sex trafficking, so it is no surprise that much of the audience recognized this. What was slightly shocking was the outspoken support for teaching youth about this subject. Although this is sensitive and potentially upsetting subject matter, it was unanimously agreed upon that **Chelsea’s Story** and education on human sex trafficking should be given to the targeted age groups to ensure their protection. This was a theme that ran strong in every showing, especially the GVI showing and the showing to the middle school.

The GVI participants were particularly supportive of a curriculum that fosters education on difficult subject matter like consent and sexual manipulation. Of the 20 GVI participants, 12 were for education to parents and youth on the dangers threatening human sex trafficking. One survey participant said, “More events of awareness for kids like **Chelsea’s Story** because it was easy to understand” (survey participant, GVI), while another said, “More awareness of the way perpetrators groom and pick their victims. Doing these types of plays in schools” (survey participant, GVI).

Many participants from the Registry Theatre performances also supported teaching youth, particularly in a school or classroom setting. This sentiment was strongly shared not only in the ‘talk-backs’ at the end of each showing, it was shared time and time again in the completed surveys. One participant wrote that, to prevent human sex trafficking, “educational programs, like this show! If we can educate potential victims, hopefully we can prevent the spread of misinformation and manipulation, and help survivors find resources for them” (survey participant, Registry Theatre, Sunday matinee).

Although there was so much feedback supporting educating youth on this topic, perhaps the most powerful feedback came from the students themselves. Many recognized the danger they could find themselves in and wrote to support continued education in schools. One student wrote:

“I think spreading awareness as to what [human sex trafficking] is and the signs, and also teaching people about consent and respecting one another. I think that a lot of people think that oh I can just use common sense, but it truly does apply to everyone because even the safest people can get caught. I think that this play brings it close to home and helped some people take things more seriously” (student participant, middle school performance).

When asked what they think might prevent human sex trafficking, another student said:

“Nothing. I believe there will always be people who [are] trolls or can make so much money out of manipulating people. The only thing that can help is spreading awareness to kids and honestly just anybody out there. I won’t mention common sense, because I don’t know how it feels to be vulnerable…” (student participant, middle school performance).

Often adolescents and youth are not given enough credit to understand difficult and disturbing subject matter like sexual manipulation or human sex trafficking. But, when given the chance to learn, many not only understand the problem and how it applies to their lives but have clear ideas of how to help prevent the problem in their community. It is imperative that these young people be given the voices and knowledge to help make a better future for the coming generations.

*Reach Out to Marginalized Populations*

Although not the only target for human sex trafficking, marginalized populations are particularly vulnerable to falling into the traps set out by human sex traffickers. This has been particularly apparent in Canada where a massive overrepresentation of human sex trafficking victims are Indigenous women (Ontario Women’s Association, 2016). To help reduce these vulnerabilities, it is necessary for the community to reach out a helping hand through services appropriate for these groups.

This theme of protecting marginalized populations was repeated over and over. It was especially heard in the Registry Theatre participants. A participant from the final performance said to reduce sex trafficking “a combination of education, strong communities and strong social supports (e.g. basic income, affordable housing, housing first, solutions for homelessness, etc.) to reduce the number of vulnerable people in our society would at least be a start” (survey participant, Registry Theatre, Sunday matinee). Another participant said “provid[e] better social services to those who are vulnerable [to prevent human sex trafficking]. Encourage a society that is more respectful and protective of youth and young people” (survey participant, Registry Theatre, Sunday matinee). By protecting marginalized populations, it will likely greatly decrease human sex trafficking overall and perhaps throttle the market for these types of services.

A marginalized population that was mentioned often in the GVI residents’ surveys was youth with low self-esteem. It was emphasized in more than one survey that it is important to offer supports to youth struggling with self-esteem and want for attention. One GVI resident stated, “be aware of your surroundings and the people/company you keep around you. Talk to someone about self-esteem/attention issues” (survey participant, GVI). This sentiment also came up in the Registry Theatre showings. One participant said to prevent human trafficking “raising self-esteem of young vulnerable people. Increase exposure of impact on survivor for those who offend” (survey participant, Registry Theatre, Friday night).

*Create Language to Foster Open Communication on Sex and Consent*

Another key sentiment shared by participants that viewed the play is that much of the population today is limited and may be exposed to human sex trafficking because of lack of sex education. Curriculum standards in Ontario do not specify education on topics such as consent, sexual orientation and manipulation in relationships. The curriculum is centred on a biological approach to anatomy, sexually transmitted infections and education on birth control methods. This has become a highly debated topic in Ontario. However, much of the audience that viewed **Chelsea’s Story** agreed that the current Ontario curriculum for sex education is not educational enough to properly equip the next generation.

In many of the talk-backs, the opinion that education on consent, hypermasculinity and basic respect are often overlooked and must be better taught. One participant wrote, “developing healthy relationships and understanding of consent at young ages. Awareness. Multi-faceted, full community response/commitment” (survey participant, Registry Theatre, Friday night). Another survey participant stated that to prevent human sex trafficking the community must “…continue to encourage confidence and communication with young girls and boys…” (survey participant, Registry Theatre, Saturday matinee).

*Define the Lines Between Human Sex Trafficking and Sex Work*

The terms human “sex trafficking” and “sex work” are often confused or conflated. It can be difficult to understand what both mean and how they are separate from each other; human sex trafficking requires that the victim (be/is forced) offer sex as a service. It is about the intent behind the act rather than the act itself. Sex work is done for one’s own profit while human sex trafficking requires that the victim be coerced against their own will for the profit of others. This confusion was also present in the feedback from **Chelsea’s Story**. A participant wrote on their survey when asked how to stop human sex trafficking, “Making the line between trafficking and legitimate sex work very clear…” (survey participant, Registry Theatre, opening night).

However, one participant had feedback for the play, saying “…A part in the play that conflicts with sex work and trafficking and that’s not super helpful I think but can easily be changed!” (survey participant, Registry Theatre, Saturday night). This shows that even with these terms in mind, it can be difficult to truly portray the difference required to educate and not confuse.

*Limitations*

A main limitation to this study is that many Canadians are new to the knowledge presented in the play. Many Canadians do not recognize human sex trafficking as a problem, so instead of simply educating youth and potential victims, the population must first be educated. This may be a limitation to the study since much of the feedback was educate anyone and everyone, diverting attention away from other themes that may have presented themselves. Another limitation is the sample of participants that attended the events and completed the survey are likely not a true representation of the whole community’s beliefs or opinions. Most of the participants were women and are likely either very interested in the subject matter or already very involved in their community. This may present gaps in viewpoints of marginalized populations and should be further explored.

Conclusion

Through the dispensing of two different educational platforms, **Very Young Girls and Chelsea’s Story**, this work was initiated offer some understanding of public perceptions on human sex trafficking in the Kitchener Waterloo area. The results showed that an overwhelming number of people did not understand that human sex trafficking is present in their community and not only international. Themes that presented themselves both in completed surveys and through the talk-back discussions pointed out new avenues to educate the population and structural things that should change to foster that education. The general population largely remains unaware of the crimes being committed in Canada and that “bubble must be popped.” To do that, new language must be formed around romantic relationships and consent and the lines between human sex trafficking and sex work should be better defined and taught. Targets like marginalized populations and youth need more support so they are better educated and can feel empowered to make steps in prevention. Government involvement and funding is key in this.

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