



Submission by SPACE International for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the Human Rights Council on prostitution and violence against women and girls (January 2024)

SPACE International (Survivors of Prostitution Abuse Calling for Enlightenment) is a global [network](#) of prostitution survivors calling for political recognition of prostitution as sexually abusive exploitation, and for Governments around the world to hold accountable and criminalize those who pay for sexual access to human beings.

We thank the Special rapporteur on violence against women and girls for this unique opportunity to submit some of our collective findings on the irrefutable links between the system of prostitution and violence against women and girls.

We are offering examples of the profiles of women and girls affected by prostitution in the United States and Canada, respectively, two countries in which SPACE Intl's representatives have survived the sex trade.

TWO CASE STUDIES: THE EVA CENTER AND WASAYAKWE CONSULTING

1. THE EVA CENTER, UNITED STATES

The profiles of the women the EVA Center serves.

The EVA Center is a survivor-led program in Boston, in the U.S. state of Massachusetts, which offers services, including a safe home emergency shelter. Since 2006, we have served over a thousand women, providing emergency resources for those over the age of 18 who can exit the sex trade.

Almost unanimously, the young women the EVA Center serves have survived complex and multiple forms of childhood adverse experiences, such as incest, childhood sexual abuse, state-sponsored residential homes, domestic violence, intergenerational prostitution, displacement, and other forms of abuse leading to complex trauma. Third-party exploiters and the system of prostitution thrive on the abuse of power and the abuse of vulnerabilities of their victims.

In 2022, the EVA Center welcomed 28 women in our safe home program, designed to provide prostituted women with immediate access to safety, support and resources. Out of the 28 women, 19 were women of color, mostly of African descent, with an age range between 19 and 27-years-old.

Among them, 72% disclosed they had aged out of state-sponsored protective services and residential group homes, managed by the Massachusetts Department for Children and Families, and the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services. Once these clients reached the age of 18, unprepared for life, with no family support, and homeless, the system of prostitution into which they were sold became,



or continued to be, a continuum of violence that had started early in their lives. Half of these women had children who were sent into the Massachusetts protective services system, with the only promise of repeating the cycle of vulnerability and violence.

Acutely vulnerable girls and women, especially of color, throughout the US are considered disposable, living with the risks of being subjected to the inherent dangers and exploitation of prostitution, which include pervasive occurrences of sexual assault, beatings, and economic violence of quotas imposed by their exploiters to secure food, shelter and their survival.

Offering a few examples from the EVA Center's 2024 cohort: one young woman we served was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury from the beatings she endured by her pimp, with whom she had an intimate relationship. Another woman, who is still in our safe home, was offered housing by a sex buyer after she had aged out of the Massachusetts foster care system and rendered homeless, who brutally raped her. It was later disclosed that he was a registered sex offender. A third young woman required re-constructive facial surgery. Her exploiter, whom she described as her boyfriend, had tried to kill her in Oakland, California. Seeking to escape, she jumped out of a moving vehicle causing her severe injuries.

These are just three examples taken from the EVA Center's 2024 cohort. Every year presents us with a new batch of cases, which are too numerous to disclose here. Most of the women report to have lived in low-cost hotels paid for by their pimp-boyfriends, who sell them to sex buyers through online websites, social media and financial mobile applications, all of which having dramatically expanded the sex trade in the United States.ⁱ

While the EVA Center findings represent just one direct services agency in just one city of the United States, this fact pattern for the women and girls in the system of prostitution is pervasive across the United States. Of particular note are the racial disparities across the United States showing the majority of sex trade survivors are women and girls of color. In the state of Connecticut, the Department of Children and Families reported that 73% of sex trafficking referrals were for children of color, and 87% of which were girls.ⁱⁱ In Kings County, Washington state, 44% of all children bought and sold in the sex trade, the majority of whom are girls, are Black, although Black people only represent 7% of the Washington state populationⁱⁱⁱ. In Los Angeles County in the state of California, two thirds of sex trafficked youth are of African descent, noting that only 7.4% of the child population in Los Angeles is Black.^{iv}

Some of the forms of violence prostituted women and girls to which they are subjected.

The act of prostitution, the buying and selling of human beings for sexual acts and third-party profit, is inherently harmful physically and psychologically. A prostituted person must disconnect and dissociate from herself to engage in prostitution. Many of us were not addicted to substances (alcohol, soft and hard drugs) prior to our experiences in prostitution, but became so afterwards in order to numb the pain and endure life. Many of us are mothers who often fail to bond with our children—the most damaging



in life relationships — because of the violence and complex trauma and compounded abuse we suffered.

The harm that the system of prostitution itself inflicts on human beings does not account for the violence, torture and dehumanization the exploiters (e.g. pimps, brothel and strip club managers, sex traffickers) and sex buyers make us endure. The vast majority of us had quotas to fulfil, meaning the amount of money owners and managers of commercial sex establishments (brothels, “massage parlors,” strip clubs) and pimps required us to make every night by engaging in sexual acts with patronizers. An extreme form of economic violence and a violation of human dignity, quotas are a key element of lucrative third-party exploitation that contribute to the global profits of the sex trade.

A note on the role of pornography:

Sex buyers often play out their violent sexual fantasies, informed by the pornography they consume and perform on the women and girls they purchase. There is a connection between pornography and the types of sexual acts sex buyers demand of the women and girls they purchase. We know this because sex buyers tell us what acts they want us to perform based on the pornography they watch.^v

Prostituted women and girls suffer levels of violence, sexual violence, torture, or even death by murder at the hands of sex buyers. Most of these crimes are not reported to law enforcement and even when they are, the complaints are not met with the urgency of care or accountability that other crimes generate. The most egregious example of this indifference from our justice system are the cases of serial killers murdering women in prostitution.

In the United States, prostituted women and girls made up 22% of the total confirmed serial killer victims between 1970 and 2009, despite only accounting for 0.3% of the total population^{vi}. More recently, in 2024, an alleged serial killer, Rex Heuermann, was charged with the murders of four women in New York state, which occurred between 2007 and 2011, all of whom were “escorts” he found on the classified ads website Craigslist^{vii}. In Canada, convicted serial killer, Robert Pickton was arrested for the murder of 26 women, though the numbers are presumed to be much higher. Almost all of his victims were Indigenous; his arrest and indictment sparked a government investigation into the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls^{viii}.

However, not all killers are caught. The New Bedford Highway serial killer case remains unsolved, almost 40 years after 11 women with ties to prostitution disappeared and later found dead on a road near New Bedford, Massachusetts^{ix}. Women and girls in prostitution are particularly vulnerable to sexual predators and serial killers given their low social status.^x When prostituted women seek help or protection from law enforcement, including the reporting of serious crimes, police officers often dismiss their concerns. When families of missing prostituted women report their disappearances, law enforcement can fail to register their complaints, which can delay or bypass murder investigations^{xi}. In the words of Gary Ridgway, a man who murdered 48 prostituted women between Seattle and Tacoma,



in the state of Washington, they can “kill as many [prostituted women] as [they want] without getting caught”^{xii}.

What measures are in place to assist and support women and girls who wish to leave.

Little to none. Many of us as survivors have created service provision agencies out of a critical need but we struggle for adequate funding. There is an urgent need for programs specific to women and girls who wish to leave the sex trade; the stigma related to prostitution and its structure are rarely understood in traditional services agencies. We know an overwhelming majority of prostituted women want to exit, but access to emergency shelter programs that can offer comprehensive and long-term support and resources are needed, especially for those in crisis or with significant safety issues. They also need access to financial support until they can acquire government benefits or viable employment. Without this assistance in place, women return to the sex trade to survive. Exiting is a complicated process, yet prostituted women deserve help to escape the cycles of prostitution, violence and poverty.

Prostitution in all its forms needs to end as no other “activity” imposes this much violence, or hinders the ability to live a life free from violence, or enjoy equality and dignity.

Cherie Jimenez

Executive Director, SPACE Intl, and Founder of the EVA Center

2. WASAYAKWE CONSULTING, CANADA

Hidden forms of prostitution in Canada.

The situation for women and girls in Canada, especially in prostitution, has worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic and the opioid crisis. The “visible” prostitution is found in neighborhoods stricken by poverty and infested by drugs and drug dealers, in tent cities, in “man camps”^{xiii} (temporary housing for men working in extractive industries), and Native Canadian reservations.

Prostitution has mostly moved online, both on prostitution websites like [RedZone](#) and on mainstream platforms such as [LeoList](#), Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, [Tagged](#), [Plenty of Fish](#), Bumble, and other online dating sites forums.

Profile of women affected in Canada.

Indigenous women and girls are extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation and make up 52%^{xiv} of those involved in prostitution, while Native women and girls make up approximately 2%^{xv} of the general population in Canada.

Native women and girls in the system of prostitution are also disproportionately vulnerable due to colonization and historical trauma purported by racist government policies that include a lasting legacy of the residential school system, forced assimilation^{xvi}, and forced sterilization^{xvii}. Native Canadian women and girls are also more likely to have experienced sexual abuse by a family member or stranger.



The Canadian government launched a national inquiry into the missing and murdered Native women and girls, MMIWG, and found strong links between the disappearances and commercial sexual exploitation. Vancouver in particular has a horrific history of serial killers preying on Native women and girls from the Downtown Eastside neighborhood, one of the city's oldest neighborhoods suffering from disproportionately high levels of drug use, homelessness, poverty, crime, mental illness and prostitution^{xviii}. Another conduit linked to the MMIWG is a highway in British Columbia, also known as the Highway of Tears. This is a 724 km stretch of highway in British Columbia that is known for its exceedingly high rates of disappeared and murdered women, particularly Indigenous^{xix}.

The British Columbia MMIWG^{xx} inquiry found that the problem was systemic and that better policing was needed to protect the women and girls and hold perpetrators accountable. The inquiry also found that poverty and race played a significant role in prostitution and sex trafficking. The national inquiry on MMIWG also found that policing and the child welfare systems contributed to the problem. Recently, mass graves of Indigenous children who were killed in the forced residential schools added to the toll of MMIWG^{xxi}.

As a survivor of prostitution and an Indigenous Canadian woman, I too suffered with the murder of my daughter Soleil. She was 21 years old and had Asperger's Syndrome. She was struggling with substance addiction and mental health. My last daughter lost her life to a man who was a pimp and drug dealer. In Canada, death by fentanyl poisoning is a new form of murder.

Native women and girls are being systematically exploited and abused directly and indirectly by the Canadian government and its agents. It is neither the streets nor the laws that are killing Indigenous women and girls, but the men who sell them and purchase them in prostitution.

The findings from the MMIWG Inquiry show that the Canadian government still fails Indigenous women and girls. Native women and girls do not need any more inquiries and reports, but direct action from the Canadian Government to protect us. Canada's sacred Native women and girls are still being bought and sold in prostitution, and are missing and being murdered like disposable commodities. The current mining and other extraction industries, and deforestation occurring today are living documentation of an ongoing femicide of Native women and girls. The international community must understand this as an urgent crisis that requires urgent attention for the protection and preservation of Native women and girls.

Bridget Perrier, SPACE Intl Representative, Founder of Wasayakwe Consulting

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ⁱⁱ Yvette Young, Bree'Ana Johnson, Christopher Bidorini & Erin Williamson, HART HELPS, Let's Talk About Race & Human Trafficking (2019), p.1.

- iii “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children” (2022), King County (WA) Prosecuting Attorney’s Office Commercial Sexual Exploitation Cases, <https://www.kingcountycsec.org/data>.
- iv “Strategies to End Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Youth: A Toolkit for Collaborative Action” (2020), Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, National Center for Youth Law, https://youthlaw.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2022-03/NCYL_Toolkit_0809.pdf, p. 35.
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