



[Select Committee]

ON THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MINORS

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DU QUÉBEC

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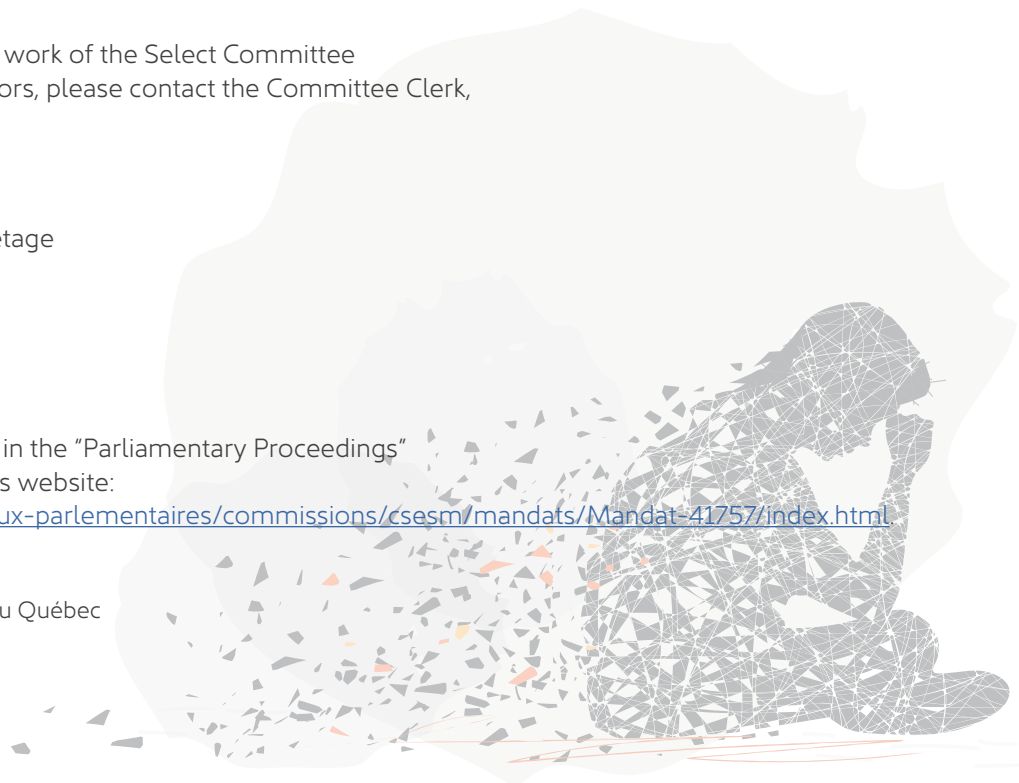
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A WORD FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE

On June 14, 2019, the members of the National Assembly adopted a motion to create the Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors, showing that they are committed to working on this issue, which can affect anyone.

The sexual exploitation of minors has long been a concern for our society. There are many cases in Québec and the rest of the country and victims come from all walks of life. While adolescence and the transition to adulthood is a time of exploration, discovery and self-construction, it can also be characterized by moments of physical, psychological and emotional vulnerability, which is why procurers and client abusers are often drawn on young people.

The various forms of sexual exploitation must be identified to effectively counter this phenomenon. It is important to realize that both girls and boys can be victims. People belonging to ethnocultural communities and sexual minorities are also targeted by procurers and client abusers.

It is our responsibility to protect Québec's girls and boys as well as to provide adequate support for victims and their families. It is also crucial we find ways to stop the actions of procurers and client abusers. The Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors is a means for the National Assembly to listen to the public, analyze the situation and, most importantly, come up with actionable measures to combat this phenomenon. The Committee members are united in a spirit of transpartisanship and will carry out this mandate with respect for the dignity of the victims and their families.

In order to fulfill this mandate, special consultations and public hearings will be held in the fall of 2019 and winter of 2020. These public hearings will be an opportunity for the Select Committee to hear both from organizations whose mission is to prevent or intervene in the sexual exploitation of minors and from top researchers in this field. The Select Committee would also like to travel to meet with individuals who work on a daily basis to combat the sexual exploitation of minors.

The Committee members will also meet with victims to hear their stories so they can better understand their realities and propose actions that reflect those realities. As we conduct our work, we want to keep in mind the consequences victims and their families face. Their resilience is an inspiration.


 Chair
 Ian Lafrenière


 Vice Chair
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INTRODUCTION

On June 14, 2019, the members of the National Assembly of Québec unanimously adopted a motion to form a select committee to develop a portrait of the sexual exploitation of minors in Québec, including how it affects their transition into adulthood, and any other considerations that could help Committee members understand the situation.

Committee members attended training sessions on August 26, 27, and 28, 2019, to bring themselves up to speed on this issue. They met with experts, police officers, and people who work with young victims. The testimony of a survivor affected them deeply and spurred them into action.

The Committee has chosen to focus its work on the commercial sexual exploitation of minors. More specifically, it aims to identify effective measures of fighting sexual exploitation, helping victims cope and supporting them as they rebuild their lives.

OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN QUÉBEC

It is difficult to determine the extent to which minors are being sexually exploited. Various sources indicate that this is a growing phenomenon and that it occurs throughout Québec. Sexual exploitation occurs primarily in urban centres, especially in the Montréal area.

Different types of sexual exploitation of minors

Secrétariat à la condition féminine defines sexual exploitation as follows: “In its many forms, sexual exploitation generally involves a situation, context or relationship in which an individual takes advantage of a person’s state of vulnerability or dependence or the existence of unequal power dynamics to use that person’s body for sexual purposes and to take advantage of it. It may be a pecuniary, social or personal benefit, such as sexual gratification, or any other form of benefit.”

Sexual assault, child pornography and sexting—which can lead to blackmail and manipulation—are forms of exploitation found in Québec.

Sexual exploitation can be committed for commercial reasons. Sexual services can be commodified in exchange for money, goods, drugs or accommodation as well as for sex tourism. In the majority of cases, the purpose of human trafficking in Canada is to sexually exploit the victims. Victims are forced to engage in sex acts through violence, threats or other means of coercion.

The Committee will tackle sexual exploitation from this angle. It therefore regularly uses terminology that is not used to discuss adult prostitution. It talks about victims and client abusers, whether or not the individuals are aware they are being exploited.

Legal Framework

Obtaining sexual services from minors and receiving material benefits from it is illegal in Canada. The Criminal Code contains several sections on this subject.

Under Section 153, sexual exploitation is an offence that applies in cases where a young person is forced to commit a sexual act by a person in a position of authority or by a person with whom the young person is in a relationship of dependency.

Sections 286.1 to 286.5 deal with the commodification of sexual services. It is illegal to obtain sexual services in exchange for payment in and of itself. The penalties are more severe when the victim is a minor. The same applies to procuring and benefiting from the material advantages of prostitution. In addition, individuals who traffic in persons, including trafficking for sexual exploitation, are liable to a penalty under the Criminal Code.

It should be noted that minors who provide sexual services are considered victims and are not criminalized, apart from the exceptions provided for by law. The purpose of this distinction is to make it easier for victims to identify abusers and perpetrators, while also targeting clients.

Available information on the prevalence of the phenomenon

Police sources provide a partial picture of the extent of the problem. A report drafted in 2013 by Service du renseignement criminel du Québec notes that official data underestimates the extent of the phenomenon because of its hidden nature and the limited number of victims who come forward.¹ Of the victims of sexual exploitation who were identified, 39% were minors. However, it is impossible to know if this rate is representative.

An estimated 300 minors were sexually exploited in Montréal in 2009.² Conseil du statut de la femme (the council on the status of women) reports that 80% of sex workers entered the sex trade as minors. Several organizations that work with people in the sex industry have reported that a majority of sex workers enter the industry before the age of 18. While this is widespread and worrying, it is difficult to quantify.

Places where sexual exploitation occurs

Establishments that are part of the sex industry such as strip clubs, massage parlours and escort agencies are environments that are conducive to sexual exploitation. Although the numbers change frequently in this volatile industry, an estimated 330 establishments offer sexual services in the Montréal area. Throughout Québec, there are over 630 establishments that are associated with the sex industry.³ Activities involving the exploitation of minors are sometimes carried out in secret in these establishments.

¹ Service du renseignement criminel du Québec, *Portrait provincial du proxénétisme et de la traite des personnes*, 2013, 22 p.

² Conseil du statut de la femme, *La prostitution : il est temps d'agir*, 2012, p. 46-47.

³ Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle (CLES), *Portrait de l'industrie du sexe au Québec*, 2014, p. 25.

Due to its clandestine nature, the sexual exploitation of minors occurs in hotels, private residences and even in accommodations booked through short-term rental platforms. Client abusers are then informed through online advertisements. The street is no longer the primary place where the sexual services of victims are sold. The more under the radar and hidden the sexual exploitation becomes, the harder it is to detect.

PROFILES AND REALITIES OF INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MINORS

The sexual exploitation of young people is fuelled by both systemic causes and individual vulnerabilities. Social and cultural phenomena such as hypersexualization, the trivialization of sexuality and early sexualization influence young people's perceptions. Gender stereotypes and pornographic representations contribute to the objectification of women.

The sexual exploitation of minors can be analyzed using an economic principle based on the interaction between actors—victims, procurers (exploiters and sometimes traffickers) and client abusers. The demand from client abusers drives the exploitation activities of procurers and traffickers and puts pressure on them to recruit and exploit victims.

Victims

Any individual can be recruited and sexually exploited. However, there are certain factors that make individuals more vulnerable. Youth who have been sexually or physically abused as well as those who experience neglect or a lack of parental supervision are at higher risk.

Women represent nearly 90% of victims of sexual exploitation⁴. They may be drawn in for emotional reasons or for financial gain. Regardless of their situation, they all have one thing in common: they never engage in the dynamics of sexual exploitation with full knowledge of the facts.

The motivations of young men are different and are often more related to survival, such as a need for housing or food. They are not necessarily being controlled by a procurer. There is currently very little information on the sexual exploitation of young men.

Sexual minorities such as transgender and non-binary individuals can also become victims of sexual exploitation. Some individuals are vulnerable because of the high costs associated with gender reassignment surgery.

The dynamics of sexual exploitation of Indigenous youth are under-documented and often misunderstood. However, we know that Indigenous women are over-represented among victims of exploitation. Those who leave their communities for urban centres are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by procurers.

Finally, people from ethnocultural communities are also over-represented among victims of sexual exploitation. Certain race-based sexual stereotypes make these individuals more attractive to recruiters.

⁴ Service du renseignement criminel du Québec, op. cit. p. 17.

Victims of human trafficking

In Canada, nearly 40% of trafficking victims are minors. Trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation accounts for the majority of cases. Traffickers exploit victims' vulnerabilities, including the need for money, love and affection.

Procuring and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation

Procurers and traffickers come from all ethnocultural and linguistic backgrounds and from all walks of life. Their motivations are primarily financial. They can act individually or within an organized network or even hide in the margins of the legal parts of the economy. Statistics show that procurers and traffickers engage in a number of criminal activities. They are also often charged with violent crimes.

According to a Service du renseignement criminel du Québec report, 85% of procurers are male and 15% are female. The latter may have been victims themselves.

Procurers are not always affiliated with criminal groups or street gangs. However, suspects involved in more than one case of procuring are primarily affiliated with street gangs.

Client abusers of minors

Little is known about clients, but there is a demand for young girls. Police operations targeting this type of crime have resulted in arrests in some regions of Québec. There is no single profile of client abusers, apart from the fact that they are almost exclusively male. Their age and professions vary and they come from all classes of society. Their role is central to the dynamics of sexual exploitation since they create the demand.

Indirect actors of sexual exploitation

In addition to victims, procurers and client abusers, some actors facilitate or help maintain situations of sexual exploitation. Their activities may be legal and even legitimate.

The hotel sector and short-term accommodation rental platforms provide procurers with places to organize their activities. Social networks facilitate the work of exploiters. Many popular websites and applications are used by procurers to recruit minors.

The tourism industry also fuels demand. Organizations active in the field report an increase in the number of sexual service ads during major events. These circumstances often coincide with an increase in the number of runaways.

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Exploiters search for their victims in any public place where young people gather (parks, shopping malls, public transit, schools, etc.). Social networks are used as tools to increase recruitment opportunities. Exploiters often target several young people at once and focus their efforts on the most vulnerable.

Procurers use different manipulation strategies such as offering attractive opportunities, providing victims with drugs or posing as friends. Some will try to charm their victims, leading them to develop feelings of love. Others offer more of a business relationship and focus on the financial gains and luxurious, jet set lifestyle.

Procurers and traffickers use different means to maintain their control over victims. Victims often become trapped in a vicious circle they can't escape.

Tactics include psychological manipulation, social isolation, threats, violence and exploiting drug and narcotic addictions. In some cases, exploiters attack the rights and freedoms of victims: they make them sign employment contracts, tattoo them and charge exorbitant fees to get out of the business.

In some cases, exploiters take away victims' IDs to deprive them of their freedom. Trafficked individuals are also frequently transported to other provinces. This cuts them off from their social network and further isolates victims who do not speak English. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for them to get help.

Consequences for victims' transition into adulthood

Victims of sexual exploitation suffer serious consequences. They experience more violence and aggression than the general population. They are also at high risk of contracting sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) and developing other health problems because of their living conditions.

In addition, several studies have documented the psychological damage of sexual exploitation. Victims frequently feel guilty and blame themselves for what has happened to them, while minimizing the violence they are subjected to. Based on their situations, victims are likely to have multiple psychological sequelae.

Socially, young victims may drop out of school and miss the opportunity to gain work experience. Their experience in an exploitative situation can also affect their relationships with friends and family.

Victims may repeatedly attempt to escape from a sexually exploitative environment. In addition to being controlled by their exploiters, victims of sexual exploitation have trouble earning income and accessing housing and public services. So it may be difficult for a victim to stop their activities when their basic needs are not being met.

The difficulties victims experience do not end once they turn 18 or when their exploitation ends. That's why it is so important to support and follow-up with adult victims.

COURSES OF ACTION AND ACTIONABLE MEASURES TO THINK ABOUT

The members of the National Assembly are aware that the sexual exploitation of minors is both a complex social issue and a sensitive interpersonal issue. They aim to identify effective courses of action to combat this phenomenon, which seriously and permanently affects victims and their families. They are particularly concerned because cases of sexual exploitation involving minors are increasing in Québec.

They therefore put forward a number of questions, including the following:

- What prevention, awareness-raising and educational measures could be implemented for young people and their families, potential client abusers and indirect actors in sexual exploitation to reduce the risks of exploitation?
- What screening and reporting measures could help to identify victims of exploitation and help identify and monitor procurers, traffickers and client abusers?
- What intervention measures could be taken to:
 - Facilitate contact and follow-up with victims?
 - Compel or urge procurers, traffickers and client abusers to stop their criminal activities?
 - Lead indirect actors to stop driving the dynamics of exploitation or to become partners in the fight against the sexual exploitation of minors?
- Regarding the process of getting out of situations of sexual exploitation, what measures could:
 - Help victims break the cycle of exploitation?
 - Reduce the risk of procurers, traffickers and client abusers reoffending?
- During the transition to adulthood and beyond, what measures could help survivors of sexual exploitation heal and restore their personal balance?
- Are current measures and frameworks (legislative, regulatory, etc.) adequate? Do they go far enough? Should they be modified or expanded?
- Should targeted measures be implemented for the various groups of people affected by sexual exploitation (Indigenous people, girls, boys, sexual minorities, ethnocultural minorities, etc.)? If so, what would be the most effective measures to put in place for these different groups?
- Finally, what other possible solutions could inform the Committee's work?

CONCLUSION

The Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors relies on Quebecers to help it carry out its work. Once it has completed its mandate, the Committee intends to publish its observations, conclusions and recommendations. It hopes that the consultations will help it determine the most effective measures to combat the sexual exploitation of minors in Québec.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COMMITTEE'S MANDATE

1. By attending the Select Committee's public hearings in Québec City, Montréal, and Val-d'Or in the fall of 2019 and winter of 2020. To follow the Committee's work, click here:
[Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors](#)
2. By sending a brief before March 1, 2020, to the members of the Select Committee;
3. By sending an online comment to the members of the Select Committee. To send a comment, click here:
[Commenting on a Subject Under Examination](#)

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