



## Klinik Community Health's Statement on Sexual Exploitation

Responsibility:	All Staff and Volunteers
Area:	KOP, KOB, Brandon
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Klinik Community Health is committed to supporting people who have been negatively affected by sexual exploitation. Addressing the physical, social, mental, and spiritual health needs of all people, through access to social services and to safe and supportive environments, is central to achieving wellness. Klinik continues to advocate for those who have been, or are being exploited. We also seek to work with partners to address the social conditions that leave individuals vulnerable to exploitation.

### **Overview**

Klinik is a leader in community health, built on a foundation of social justice values. With an increasing understanding of the impacts of the social determinants of health, staff and volunteers at Klinik provide diverse services and programming targeted to populations most negatively affected by the inequitable distribution of these determinants. Our programming has a strong mental health focus, which presents opportunities for hope, healing and empowerment in a trauma-informed environment. As part of our commitment to social justice, Klinik staff and board members have identified sexual exploitation as a concern for people and the broader community.

### **Background**

Globally, people of all ages and genders may receive money, drugs, food, shelter and other necessities in exchange for sexual acts. Sexual exploitation occurs when this exchange *does not* involve mutual informed and transparent consent, or the individual has not yet reached the age of majority. Using children and youth (under the age of 18) for sexual acts is abuse, is exploitative, and is illegal<sup>1</sup>. Although children, women and trans individuals are at higher risk of sexual exploitation, people of all genders are at risk.

There are a number of ways that people can enter the sex industry, including:

- Being driven to it because of social determinants, such as poverty and homelessness;
- Being coerced or groomed into it; or
- Making a conscious choice<sup>2</sup>.

The nature of sexual exploitation makes it difficult to find representative studies and exact statistics. In Canada, Indigenous women and girls make up a large portion of both the outdoor (street-level) and indoor (escort services, online) sex industry<sup>3,4</sup>. In Winnipeg, it is estimated that approximately 400 children and youth are exploited each year, 70 to 80 percent of whom are of Indigenous descent<sup>5</sup>. A small descriptive study on domestic trafficking in urban Indigenous youth in Winnipeg found that the average age of entry was 13.8 years and that 92% percent of the study participants

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1 <http://www.serc.mb.ca/sites/default/files/What%20SERC%20Believes%20about.pdf>

2 [http://www.cpha.ca/uploads/policy/sex-work\\_e.pdf](http://www.cpha.ca/uploads/policy/sex-work_e.pdf)

3 [https://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth/pdf/sex\\_exploit.pdf](https://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth/pdf/sex_exploit.pdf)

4 <http://www.understandingsexwork.com/sites/default/files/uploads/BillC36brief.pdf>

5 TERF Mentor and Youth Program Evaluation Reports, 2005 & 2006, as quoted in Ferland, N., Denby, C., Neuman, M. & Bruce, A. (2012). Protecting Sacred Lives: Urban Aboriginal Youth Domestic Trafficking in Persons Policy Research Report.

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reported a history of sexual abuse/assault<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, a study of 100 women from Vancouver who were involved in the sex industry found that 82 percent had a history of childhood sexual abuse, by an average of four different people<sup>7</sup>.

The practice of sex trafficking is interwoven into the fabric of the sex industry and may include cyber-bullying, prostitution, pornography, and/or stripping. Sexual exploitation and human trafficking are serious issues of concern in Manitoba, as we know that over 90% of trafficking victims come from within Canada, often from northern reserves<sup>8</sup>. While a sex worker may freely choose to give their earnings to someone else, it becomes trafficking if they are forced or tricked into to doing so by coercion, deception, or actual/threatened physical, emotional, or sexual abuse towards the individual and/or their family or friends. It is estimated that each female who is trafficked in Canada generates an average annual profit of \$280,000<sup>9</sup> for their traffickers.

The lives of all those involved in the sex industry intersect (engaged in the purchase and sale of sex acts, generally advertised in the same places, meet the same demand for sexual acts<sup>10</sup>). This means that legislation, regulations, and services designed for those who are exploited and those who choose to work in the sex industry inevitably affect both. The question of whether or not to criminalize the sale or purchase of sex does not address the root causes of structural and systemic violence that create power imbalances, however, the reality and evidence demonstrates that decriminalization is an important step in ensuring access to supports and safety. The links to poverty, violence, colonization and other social determinants of health clearly demonstrate the need for strong upstream strategies. Further, Public Health approaches of harm reduction and addressing social determinants of health will provide the tools needed to address the underlying factors which result in vulnerability to sex trafficking, violence, and forced or compelled participation in the sex industry.

## **Key Considerations and Recommendations**

### **External:**

- Build awareness of exploitation and its impacts.
- Work with other organizations to identify and address the root causes of sexual exploitation.
- Continue to support the position that exploitative behaviour is unacceptable in society.
- Advocate for decriminalizing sex work.
- Support and endorse Harm Reduction principles, including the positions developed by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and the Manitoba Government (imbed links)

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6 Ferland, N., Denby, C., Neuman, M. & Bruce, A. (2012). Protecting Sacred Lives: Urban Aboriginal Youth Domestic Trafficking in Persons Policy Research Report.

7 Farley, M., Lynne, J. & Cotton, A. (2005) Prostitution in Vancouver: Violence and the Colonization of First Nations Women

8 [http://www.canadianwomen.org/sites/canadianwomen.org/files/FactSheet-EndHumanTrafficking%20\(Aruna%20Edit%20-%20ONLINE\)\\_0.pdf](http://www.canadianwomen.org/sites/canadianwomen.org/files/FactSheet-EndHumanTrafficking%20(Aruna%20Edit%20-%20ONLINE)_0.pdf)

9 <http://canadianwomen.org/sites/canadianwomen.org/files/CWF-TraffickingReport-Donor-EN-web.pdf>

10 <http://canadianwomen.org/sites/canadianwomen.org/files/CWF-TraffickingReport-Donor-EN-web.pdf>

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**Internal:**

- Provide meaningful support to people who have experienced sexual exploitation to assist their recovery.
- Develop exit strategies and supports in collaboration with individuals who wish to leave the sex industry.
- Undertake health education and health-promotion activities in the areas of consent, anti-violence, healthy relationships and healthy sex.
- Provide support to individuals currently engaged in the sex trade industry in an environment that is respectful of their personal choice and autonomy.
- Continue to build awareness and understanding of the impacts of sexual violence through existing programs (SAP, Evolve, HT, Crisis, Dream Catchers)

**General:**

- Appropriately collect and use both qualitative and quantitative data from Klinik's service-users' experiences.
- Encourage research initiatives that share knowledge and support programmatic decision-making.
- Ensure strong connections among all programs to support the exchange of information and experiences that facilitate collaboration and reduce barriers within Klinik.
- Recognize partnerships at the provincial and national level to leverage our voice by joining it with other advocates.
- Facilitate self-determined care by ensuring that programs and services are developed and running based on individual solutions.
- Recognize colonization as a social determinant of health as part of work to understand the complex role that colonization plays in the lives and health of Indigenous people in Canada.

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