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Thursday, March 22, 2012

Human Trafficking & Sex Work: What's the Difference?

This article was written by AIDS Calgary's SHIFT Team Lead. Retrieved from the Shift Calgary Blog on Thursday, March 8, 2012. <http://shiftcalgary.blogspot.ca/>

Although the terms human trafficking and sex work are often used interchangeably, there is actually a difference between the two. It is valuable to know the difference between sex work and trafficking so that we can understand & address the very real issues surrounding human trafficking and debunk the myths that surround this subject.

First, let's look at what trafficking is. According to the UN's definition, trafficking in persons "shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."

What's all that mean? It means that for trafficking to occur, three parts must be included: A process of recruitment (transporting, harbouring, or receiving a person as example), a method in which that is done (threats, abduction, fraud etc) for a goal (forced labour, sexual exploitation, servitude etc).

Now, let's look at what sex work is. We use the term sex work and sex worker as an umbrella term for any adult involved in the sex industry exchanging sexual services for money or other goods. This could include people who work as escorts, on street level, dance, webcam, in massage or many other areas. It is important to understand the sex work is referring to sexual exchange of services by adults in which consent occurs for all those involved. Therein exists one of the many differences between trafficking and sex work. Sex work does not include a process of recruitment by coercion to meet an exploitative end goal for one of the

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parties involved. Individuals involved in sex work negotiate what services will be performed and for what fee.


The fact that the difference between sex work and human trafficking is in the power of choice that is involved is not the only myth that exists around this topic. A second myth is that trafficking doesn't occur in Canada. Domestic trafficking involves the exploitation of residents of the country. According to the Action Coalition on Human Trafficking (ACT), in Canada it is disproportionately Aboriginal youth and women who fall victim to human trafficking within the country.

Another myth surrounds the idea of transportation. Although trafficking seems to imply that a trafficked person is being transported across counties or other kinds of borders, according to the ACT, most exploitation takes place close to home. Data show intra-regional and domestic trafficking are the major forms of trafficking in persons. (UNODC Report). To add to that, trafficking does not always mean that a person is being transported from one place to another. If all those three categories are present (a process, a method & a goal) without the transfer of a person, trafficking still occurs.

A third myth about human trafficking is that it only for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Human trafficking for labour does also exist, although it is largely underreported and there is less data on the topic.

Although it is important to understand that sexual human trafficking does exist, it is imperative that we understand that not every person involved in the sex industry is experiencing human trafficking, and that in fact human trafficking and sex work are two very different things.

Action Coalition on Human Trafficking <http://www.actalberta.org/about-human-trafficking/>

Posted by AIDS Calgary at 8:46 AM 
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Definitions

- ACAA - AIDS Calgary Awareness Association
- ART - Antiretroviral Therapy
- ASO - AIDS Service Organization
- HAART - Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy
- MSM - Men who have Sex with Men
- STI - Sexually Transmitted Infection
- WHO - World Health Organization

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