

Gangs, Girls and Sexual Exploitation in British Columbia

Community Consultation Paper

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Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

In late 2009, the Abbotsford Youth Commission was contacted by Victim Services and Crime Prevention, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General (MPSSG) to undertake a literature review and community consultation to explore why and how girls become involved in gangs in British Columbia, what their roles are, and the potential links to sexual exploitation. This paper consists of six main sections: an overview of the scope, key terms and methodology used in developing the paper; background and context out of which this discussion paper was initiated; a thematic analysis of key linkages between girls, gangs and sexual exploitation found in both the literature and community consultations; prevention and intervention models from both the literature and community consultations; a brief discussion of gaps in the current information available on this subject and possible next steps; and a conclusion.

The major findings of this review are that little research is available on the involvement of girls in gangs in British Columbia, and the link between gang involvement and sexual exploitation. However, existing research on sexual exploitation and youth gangs indicate that the risk factors for girls' involvement in the two are similar. While much is known about the heightened risks facing Aboriginal youth, less is known about the situation for other cultural and ethnic groups of youth in British Columbia. A continuum of support services should be developed with sensitivity to the links between both issues using culturally-relevant, gender-specific and relationship-based approaches. Additionally, more research is needed in order to fully understand the scope and nature of this issue in the lives of girls in British Columbia.

1. Overview and Introduction

In late 2009, the Abbotsford Youth Commission was contacted by Victim Services and Crime Prevention, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to examine why and how girls become involved in gangs in British Columbia, what their roles are, and the potential links to sexual exploitation. A literature review and media scan was conducted in order to inform and contextualize this discussion paper. Consultations were conducted with community stakeholders (including youth and service providers) in the Lower Mainland in order to identify emerging issues pertaining to girls' vulnerability to sexual exploitation and gang involvement. This discussion paper outlines the findings from these research endeavors. The goals of this discussion paper are to explore:

- Recent gang activity involving girls in British Columbia;
- Why and how girls become involved in/linked with gangs (i.e. specific risk factors and pathways to gang involvement and sexual exploitation);
- The various roles girls play in/through gangs including links to sexual exploitation;
- Individual, family, peer, school and community strengths/assets that support girls to resist gang involvement/sexual exploitation and build resiliency; and
- Effective gender and culturally responsive strategies for prevention, intervention and supporting the positive development of at-risk girls.

1.1 Scope

Interviews, surveys and focus groups were only conducted within the Lower Mainland, located in the southwest portion of the province of British Columbia. Therefore, conclusions drawn in this document do not reflect the entire province. More research is needed within the entire province of British Columbia to better understand regional differences in girls' involvement in gangs and links to sexual exploitation.

The community consultations revealed few examples of the sexual exploitation of girls by gangs. According to service providers, the girls they work with who have experienced sexual exploitation are in some cases linked to gang activity, but the involvement is indirect. Therefore, the majority of the information from the community consultations is regarding the sexual exploitation of girls rather than explicitly pertaining to gang involvement.

Ethnic diversity of female youth respondents involved in interviews and the focus group was limited. Therefore, we have included case studies about risk factors and pathways to gang involvement/sexual exploitation, as well as culturally relevant intervention/prevention methods specific to Aboriginal youth in British Columbia. This information was collected as part of the literature review process.

As a part of this consultation, emphasis was placed on connecting with girls who are or were involved in gang-related sexual exploitation. This turned out to be quite a challenge. A Stop Exploiting Youth (SEY) worker told us that, "many girls who were involved in the past have been moved to other provinces, either for safety or for treatment." Alternately, many experiential girls we were told about were not willing to discuss their past with us.

Gaining access to girls who are currently being sexually exploited through gangs was challenging. These girls are off the radar, and are not seeking help from services. Many service providers told us that these girls essentially go "underground" and are heavily controlled by gang members. Service

providers were our connection to the girls, and given that deeply entrenched girls are not seeking help via services, we struggled to gain contact.

We do not wish to come across as an authority on this subject. This research is of a preliminary nature; we aim to present the information collected in the literature review and in the community consultation. It is our hope that the findings presented in this discussion paper can be used as a springboard for further research to fully understand the topic of girls' involvement in gangs and their vulnerability to sexual exploitation in British Columbia. We also hope that the examples of programs for prevention and intervention can be used as models for the expansion of services available to those girls and young women at-risk of involvement, or who are already deeply entrenched.

1.2 Methodology

To gather the information necessary to complete this discussion paper several steps were taken. First, relevant literature was identified and reviewed – including a media scan of recent gang activity involving girls. Following the completion of the literature review, a number of focus groups were conducted with service providers in the Lower Mainland – including Community Action Teams (CATs), Community Action and Assessment Networks (CAANs), and youth. A total of 35 service providers and 4 youth participated in the community consultation process. Focus groups were conducted with the following groups:

- Fraser Valley Community Action Team - City of Abbotsford/Mission (9 participants)
- Stop Exploiting Youth (SEY) workers meeting - Surrey (8 participants)
- Ridge Meadows Community Action Team - Maple Ridge (10 participants)
- Tri-Cities Community Action Team - Port Coquitlam (8 participants)
- Youth focus group, Cyrus Centre - Abbotsford (4 participants)

As part of the focus groups, the service providers were asked to comment on a number of questions related to the sexual exploitation of girls and linkages to gang activity. Each question was also used as part of a paper survey distributed to participants present at the focus groups. Participants were given paper copies of the questions for two reasons: 1) in case they wanted to add and submit to us any additional information, and 2) to distribute to colleagues with experience dealing with sexually exploited girls in British Columbia – whether by gangs or not.

One focus group was conducted with at-risk and experiential youth. A different set of questions was created for the youth. The questions were used to create a youth survey as well. Youth surveys were distributed to participants present at the service provider focus groups to complete either with, or on behalf of youth they are working with. We received five completed youth surveys.

Ten one-on-one interviews were completed. Eight with professionals working within the Lower Mainland and two with experiential youth. See Appendix 1 for a list of interview participants.

Finally, following the completion of the final draft of this discussion paper, three workshops were held with a variety of professionals from across British Columbia working in fields involving youth and/or gangs. The findings of the discussion paper were shared with workshop participants. Feedback was then collected from the workshop participants and integrated into this paper, as well as summarized in Appendix 2.

Information from the literature review, community consultation and workshops has been used as the basis for this paper. The findings have been analyzed for common themes, as well as specific stories or program models that are relevant to addressing the involvement of girls in gangs, and the

link to sexual exploitation.

1.3 Key Terms

Girl/Young Woman – For the purpose of this consultation, girls/young women are defined as female youth 12 – 19 years of age.

Woman - For the purpose of this consultation, women are defined as females more than 19 years of age.

Youth – For the purposes of this report, youth refers to male, female or transgender youth under the age of 19 years. Although the term youth is applied in some contexts to individuals in their 20s, provincial services for youth generally extend only to age 19, and we are therefore using this age as the cut-off point.

Youth Gang – Also referred to as street gangs. Youth gangs have lower levels of sophistication, engage in less serious crimes, and have less structure than mid-level gangs and organized crime groups (Totten 2008).

Sexual Exploitation – Sexual exploitation is traditionally viewed as the sexual abuse of youth under age 19 through the exchange of sex for money. Sexual exploitation can also involve the exchange of sexual favours for drugs, food, a place to live or sleep, and acceptance into a peer group (McCreary Youth Foundation 2004; Hunt 2006). The Criminal Code of Canada contains several sections pertaining to sexual exploitation (212 (2) and (4); 163; 172; 153)¹, which apply to the victimization of youth age 18 or under. However, MCFD services in British Columbia for sexually exploited youth are extended to those aged 19 and under.

Human Trafficking – Human trafficking includes the recruitment, transportation, transfer, or receipt of persons, by means of threat or coercion, deception, or abuse of power, for the purpose of exploitation. Sexual exploitation can be linked to domestic trafficking (within Canada), particularly through the involvement of organized crime. The Criminal Code of Canada (section 279) outlines Canada’s laws around trafficking in persons.

2. Background and Context

This section provides the broad context out of which this study was initiated, including an overview of recent literature on sexual exploitation and youth gangs in British Columbia, as well as a scan of media attention paid to the involvement of girls in gangs in the Lower Mainland.

¹Criminal Code online at the Department of Justice Canada website:
<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/C-46/>

2.1 Provincial Context: Emerging Issues

In recent years, researchers and government departments in Canada have shown increasing need for an investigation of the role of girls in gangs. The potential links between girls' involvement in gangs and their vulnerability to sexual exploitation has emerged as a key area of concern. Canadian researchers such as Totten (2009), Dorais and Corriveau (2009), and Chatterjee (2006) agree that gang involvement of females in Canada, as well as British Columbia, can lead to their sexual exploitation. Research on sexual exploitation of youth in British Columbia also indicates some linkages between gangs and sexual exploitation (Hunt 2006), as well as indicating that the risk factors for sexual exploitation (Saewyc 2008) are similar to those for gang involvement. Additionally, domestic trafficking of girls within British Columbia for the purposes of sexual exploitation has gained increasing attention at provincial and national levels, including the potential link between gang activity and human trafficking. While little research exists about the direct linkages between sexual exploitation and gangs, community stakeholders and front-line service providers have expressed that this is an emerging issue in British Columbia with increasing need for a coordinated response.

Sexual Exploitation in British Columbia

Youth sexual exploitation is not limited to large cities like Vancouver; it is an issue that impacts both rural and urban communities across British Columbia (JIBC, 2006; Saewyc et al, 2008; ADMs Committee, 2000). Provincial community-based research on sexual exploitation in rural areas of the province (JIBC 2006) showed that silence and denial were reported to be the largest barriers to addressing violence and exploitation.

Research indicates that sexual exploitation of youth extends beyond the more visible street-level forms of exploitation. It also occurs in massage parlors, karaoke bars, trick pads, private homes, public docks, back alleys, and truck stops (McCreary Youth Foundation 2004, Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Youth 2000).

Much has been written about the impact of sexualized images of young women and societal norms about sexualizing girls at an early age, on girls' vulnerability to exploitation as well as sexist attitudes that encourage boys to devalue girls. The McCreary Youth Foundation (2004) writes that sexually exploited youth say one of the most influential factors leading to sexual exploitation is the media's preoccupation with sex. Popular cultural portrays glamorized images of highly sexualized women which create a world of contradictions and misconceptions for female youth. Youth have difficulty trying to make sense of these sexual images and understanding how they should dress and behave.

Youth Gangs in British Columbia

Turning to research on youth gang involvement, the majority of youth gang members in British Columbia belong to street gangs (Totten 2008), which are involved in serious crime and violence many times every week - this differentiates gangs from non-criminal youth groups. Street gangs typically claim an area/turf, which they protect from rival gangs. Members identify themselves through a common name, symbols, colours, signs, graffiti, clothing styles, bandanas and hats.

Totten continues that compared to mid-level gangs and organized crime groups, street gangs have lower levels of sophistication, engage in less serious crimes, are much less structured, relatively non-hierarchical, and tend to be based out of schools or neighborhoods. Significantly, street gangs are made up of younger members.

Mark Totten's 2008 research is one of very few reports written on youth gangs in British Columbia. He states that females made up just 12% of British Columbia's gang population in 2002. However this number could potentially be higher now, as media sources indicate that female involvement has been on the rise from 2002-2007 (KcKee 2009). Canada has few, if any, female hard-core criminal gangs. "Most gangs are male dominated. Females who participate in gangs are for the most part treated as sexual slaves [or trophies] and are forced to play tertiary roles. Often they are traded among gang members for coercive sex. Females are required to carry weapons and drugs because they have a decreased chance of being searched by male police officers" (Totten 2008).

The community consultation findings have similar themes; according to Sgt. Shinder Kirk, Abbotsford Police Department, "As far as we are aware, within mid-level gangs, females have no leadership roles that we have been able to identify. Having said that, we do know that young women associated to known gang members are fully aware of their partner's activities and do participate in their criminal enterprises. As a result of this involvement, the paradigm of women, girlfriends, wives who were not likely to become victims of violence are now just as susceptible to the violence as their male counterparts." Gangs may also recruit girls to get involved in the gang because they are seen as non-threatening. They seek out at-risk girls, and offer them a sense of belonging as well as material goods (clothes, money, drugs, cars, parties, etc).

The actual role of Canadian girls in gangs today seems to be changing. Recent events in the Lower Mainland indicate that gang-related violence against women is no longer off limits (KcKee 2009). The media scan below indicates that female gang members may have shifted from tertiary roles to more active roles, such as drug dealing. The focus group, interview and workshop participants said that girls involved with gangs may be asked to carry stolen goods, as they are less likely to be searched by police officers. They may take on the role of enforcers. They use violence to call in drug debts of other girls. This may include giving those indebted to the gang the option of using their bodies to pay back drug debt. They may also serve as a "den mother" or caregiver to those involved in the gang, spying on other gangs, messengers and confidants. When asked what tasks she participated in as a gang member, one female respondent stated that, "I performed sexual favours, sold drugs, jumped people, robbed people, carried weapons, and kidnapped girls and tortured them."

The Cyrus Centre focus group participants also said that females may be given the task of answering the phone, which is a direct line people call to contact a drug dealer. In this role, girls take orders from people wanting to buy drugs, as well as set up a meeting time and place for the transaction. Workshop participants also added that girls may act as crack shack operators. Finally, workshop participants shared that girls may be asked to use their names and credit to secure assets such as: houses, cars, credit cards, cell phones, etc.

2.2 Media Scan of Recent Gang Activity Involving Girls/Young Women in British Columbia

In a media scan of newspapers in the Lower Mainland (2009-2010), no girls under age 19 were found in stories about gang related activities. However, it was reported that over a 3-month period in 2009, 4 women in British Columbia were killed due to their association with gangs. Brianna Kinnear (age 22) was shot to death on February 3, 2009 (Macdonald 2009, McKee 2009). Two weeks later, Nikkie Alemy (age 23), a young mother with ties to the UN Gang, was killed in front of her child (Macdonald 2009, McKee 2009). In March 2009, Laura Lamoureux (age 36) was found shot to death in Langley (Macdonald 2009, McKee 2009). Finally on April 15, 2009, Betty Yen (age 41) was killed in her car in Richmond (Vancouver Sun 2009, McKee 2009).

In August 2009, yet another woman was gunned down in a gangland hit in her Abbotsford

basement suite. Her name was Jessica Illes (23), a mother of one. Illes was killed just days after the body of her boyfriend Bobby DiGeorgio was found in a burned-out car near the U.S. border (Bolan 2010). Both victims had ties to the Red Scorpion gang and the Bacon Brothers' crime group (Bolan 2010). In a quote from Jessica's mother Vicky, she states that, "I never thought she was in a gang. I knew she had associated with individuals that were in a gang. I didn't think she was actually part of one or in the gang. My daughter is proof that you may not live to see tomorrow" (Bolan 2010).

No indication was given that any of these women were involved in the sex trade or victims of trafficking; they appeared to be mainly involved in selling drugs as well as other tertiary gang roles. It is not known at what age these women first became involved in gangs (during adolescence or adulthood).

An article in MacLean's Magazine, (Macdonald 2009) indicates that female gang membership and women's involvement in criminal activities is on the rise in Canada. Girls – who are also closing the gender gap in terms of drug use and abuse – are no longer just appendages to male gangs; some are forming gangs of their own. The number of Canadian women behind bars has jumped 11 per cent between 2002 and 2007 (ibid). Canada-wide, six per cent of gang members are thought to be female, ranging from a low of three per cent in Ontario to a high of 12 per cent in British Columbia (ibid).

A CTV News report indicates that Canadian women are more involved in organized crime, and some criminologists believe that the women are not being exploited by the criminal underworld (McKee 2009). More women are finding a gang lifestyle as a way to make money fast (ibid).

Alternatively, Dan Ferguson of the Surrey North Delta Leader suggests that "In Lower Mainland gangs, the women are usually pampered as wives or girlfriends, or exploited as prostitutes, drug runners and other bottom-of-the-barrel players" (Ferguson 2009).

While no media information was found specifically on girls (under age 19) and gang activity, the differing opinions on the involvement of women in gang activity in British Columbia's media suggests that research is needed to understand the full scope of this issue.

3. Girls, Gangs and Sexual Exploitation: Thematic Analysis

As outlined below, the literature review and community consultation indicated that risk factors or pathways to sexual exploitation identified are similar to the risk factors for gang involvement. This suggests that youth who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation are similarly vulnerable to gang involvement. It should be noted that some of the literature on girls and gangs may not be relevant in British Columbia contexts because the research was conducted in the United States.

3.1 Pathways and risk factors to gang involvement

Females involved in gangs have unique and special risks compared to those of males. Common risks for girls include: a history of victimization (mainly physical, sexual, and emotional abuse); academic failure, truancy, school drop-out; running away; prostitution; unstable family life (lack of connectedness, isolation, other family members involved in the justice system); a history of unhealthy, dependent relationships, primarily with older males; mental health issues; and a history of substance abuse (Chatterjee 2006). Compared to males, females have experienced significantly higher rates of physical/ sexual violence and victimization in their childhood. Young women's criminal behaviour is most closely related to abuse and trauma suffered at home. Additional pathways and risk factors are outlined below.

Lack of Healthy Adult Relationships: The ways in which family problems facilitate girls' gang involvement are varied but share a common thread – young women begin spending time away from home as a result of difficulties or dangers residing therein (violence, drug abuse, weak supervision, too much supervision etc.) they seek to leave the situation and meet their social and emotional needs elsewhere. According to workshop participants, too much or too little parental supervision can contribute to gang involvement. If too little, girls have too much freedom and often participate in negative behaviours. If too much, girls seek a gang lifestyle, thinking it will provide more freedom. Gangs can serve as a surrogate extended family for adolescents who do not see their own families as meeting their needs for belonging, nurturance, and acceptance (Miller 2001). Because of this lack of connectedness, girls want to believe that they are loved and will be taken care of, even if it's through exploiters or gang members (McCreary Youth Foundation 2004).

Social Acceptance and Basic Needs: Literature indicates that girls join gangs because they perceive these groups as capable of meeting a variety of needs in their lives - social, emotional, physical, psychological, and economic (Miller 2001). According to Dorais and Corriveau (2009), young women who become involved in gang-related sexual exploitation share a desperate desire to be liked, respected and acknowledged.

Research suggests that some of the common reasons why youth get involved with gangs are the fulfillment of basic needs such as the need for: real opportunities for a better lifestyle; love, companionship and belonging; recognition, self-worth and acceptance; power, status and excitement; structure, opportunities and discipline; and, physical safety and protection (Chatterjee 2006, McCreary Youth Foundation 2004). When asked why she joined the gang, one female respondent stated, "My friends were in it. And for the free drugs and alcohol and protection."

Desire for material goods: Focus group participants said that many girls have a desire for material goods and services (i.e. tanning, nails, clothes, cars, money, drugs) they cannot afford. Recruiters and/or boyfriends can offer these things to them. Girls become involved in gangs because of their desire for these things – and in the beginning they are given free of charge. After some time, often when the girls have become accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle, they may be told they must pay for the goods and services. In many cases, payment is expected through the sexual exploitation of the young woman.

Disability as a Risk Factor: Hidden disabilities, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder have also been identified as a risk factor to gang involvement and exploitation (Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Youth 2000).

Lack of Opportunities: For these girls the possibility of obtaining a career outside of anything in the service sector is seen as practically nonexistent. Many come from female-headed families subsisting on social assistance and most have dropped out of school with no marketable skills. Their aspirations for the future are both sex-typed and unrealistic – such as rock stars, models etc. (Chesney-Lind 1997).

Gender Roles and Stereotypes: Girls find themselves in a highly gendered community where the men in their lives, although not traditional breadwinners, still make many decisions that circumscribe the possibilities open to young women (Chesney-Lind 1997).

Media Influence: According to workshop participants, the media's description of gang activity can cause youth to want to emulate gang lifestyles. Both events on the news, and on television or music television can portray a gang lifestyle of wealth, power and influence. If a girl should choose to emulate this lifestyle she is at risk of becoming gang involved and/or sexually exploited.

Attraction to the 'bad boy': Service providers identified this classic behaviour as a risk factor and pathway to gang involvement and/or sexual exploitation as a reality for many girls in the Lower Mainland. Bev Shields, a SEY worker in Abbotsford, states that, "the bad boy is exciting and glamorous and the media glamorizes the bad boy/rebel." She continues that, "in the world in which these kids live, it only makes logical sense to be on the same side as the most dangerous."

Community Marginalization: Like their male counterparts, girls share a future of powerlessness as members of the urban underclass (Chesney-Lind 1997). Girls experience exposure to gangs via both neighbourhood peers and other local friendship networks. These neighbourhoods are often impoverished and dangerous (Miller 2001).

Intergenerational Involvement in Gangs or Street Life: Older siblings, cousins, and parents who are already involved in gangs have a strong influence on girls' decisions to join (Miller 2001). Focus group participants for this report confirmed that family involvement is a major pathway for girls who become involved in gangs in the Lower Mainland.

Normalized Violence: Research indicates that girls and women turn to gangs, in part, as a means of protecting themselves from violence and other family problems and from mistreatment at the hands of other men in their lives (2001) – they essentially trade known threats, for unknown threats. Many scholars note that sexual abuse or rape in the context of family or family friends is a factor in driving young women to a gang lifestyle (Miller 2001, Vigil 2003, Spangenberg 2001).

3.2 Pathways and risk factors to sexual exploitation

Similar pathways and risk factors lead girls to sexual exploitation as those that lead to gang involvement.

Street Life: More than 1 in 3 street-involved and marginalized youth have been sexually exploited, as have 1 in 5 youth in custody (Saewyc et al. 2008).

Violence: Violence as a means for recruitment (JIBC 2006) was found to be a main pathway to youth becoming sexually exploited.

Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Queer Youth: Queer youth may be particularly at risk of sexual exploitation. Among street-involved youth as well as youth in custody, gay, lesbian, and bisexual teens were more likely to have been sexually exploited than their heterosexual peers. Fewer than half of sexually exploited street-involved youth identified themselves as heterosexual (Saewyc et al. 2008).

Meeting Basic Needs: While youth are most commonly exploited in exchange for money or drugs, they also exchange sex to meet their basic needs. More than 1 in 3 street youth are exploited in exchange for shelter, up to 1 in 4 for transportation, and up to 1 in 5 for food or clothing (Saewyc et al. 2008). An outreach worker present at the Abbotsford focus group told us that, “a street youth will do a blow job for \$5-\$25 for money. She will use that money to pick up a \$20-bag, which she will use to barter with her friends for a place to sleep.” Additionally, service providers in the community consultations said that girls trade sex for immediate needs in their lives. Examples of girls trading sex for cab rides, a place to sleep, laundry facilities, showers, or material goods were given. Bev Shields, an Abbotsford SEY worker, stated that, “nothing in the world is free. Kids who have nothing know this reality better than the rest of us. It is not always a verbal agreement, but these kids know what is expected of them in situations where they are being provided for.”

Normalized Violence: Normalized violence is a key factor in youth sexual exploitation, particularly in Aboriginal communities where intergenerational abuse is rampant (Hunt 2006). Research shows that among younger street-involved youth, 1 in 5 was living at home when they were first sexually exploited; females were more likely to be sexually exploited while living with family than males were (Saewyc et al. 2008).

Hidden Nature of Exploitation: In 2006, youth in British Columbia were as likely to have been exploited in hotels as on the streets (18%). Barely 1 in 10 had been exploited in trick pads, nightclubs or bars, and 5% were exploited through the internet. Only a small percentage of the youth surveyed had exchanged sex in massage parlors or bathhouses, but this may have been because youth exploited in such places were not reached by the 2006 survey (Saewyc et al. 2008).

Disability as a Risk Factor: Youth with FAS and FAE, as well as other developmental disabilities are particularly at risk of sexual exploitation (Hunt 2006).

Substance Use: Drug and alcohol use is often both a risk factor of becoming exploited and a method used to lead girls to exploitation. For example, drug dealers may give girls drugs for free at first, get them addicted and then tell them they have a large debt that they have to pay back through exploitation (Hunt 2006). Girls may also be offered alcohol or drugs at parties where they are then assaulted but do not remember what happened to them.

Unhealthy Adult Relationships: Focus group participants said that girls can become sexually exploited by men and women who befriend them. In many cases, girls date men or women much older than themselves. The adult then abuses the relationship by either sexually abusing the girls themselves or acting as a facilitator in their sexual exploitation.

Loitering: Service providers in the Port Coquitlam focus group identified loitering as a pathway to sexual exploitation. At-risk girls may be targeted by recruiters while loitering at hangouts such as: bus loops and exchanges; shopping malls, schools and parks.

Online Exploitation: Research by the Safe Online Outreach Society indicates that online exploitation is on the rise in British Columbia and across Canada. All service providers involved,

focus groups and surveys, as well as workshop participants identified sites such as Craigslist, Twitter and Facebook as a risk factor and pathway to sexual exploitation. In many examples, girls or pimps place suggestive photos on web-based social networking sites. In some cases, the girl posts these pictures because she thinks it is the ‘cool’ thing to do and is unaware of the danger in doing so. In other cases, the girl or pimp knowingly posts the images to advertise for dates. Service providers identified excessive amounts of unsupervised socialization online as a common risk factor and pathway.

When asked about exploitation of this nature during an interview, Bev Shields stated that, “These girls are being posted, or posting themselves, for sale where literally anyone can access this information. Consequences in the other spheres of their life can be incredibly devastating and irreparably shameful. One client, who learned I had seen her posting, cried relentlessly and was unable to look me in the eyes; ultimately disengaging her from service. If this is how she responded to a professional providing service, we can only imagine how many other parts of her life were forever shut out due to shame and regret.”

Lack of safe activities and places to hang out: Service providers and youth in the community consultations identified a lack of things to do as a risk factor and pathway to exploitation. Often girls are at a loss for things to do and find out about parties both locally and in other cities via social networking websites or through recruiters. They choose to go to these parties and end up drinking or doing drugs to the point of being too inebriated to get themselves home. They then need a ride, or a place to sleep for the night. In this circumstance, a girl may trade sex for a ride or a place to sleep, or she is taken advantage of because of her compromised mental state.

3.3 Links Between Girls’ Involvement in Gangs and Sexual Exploitation

Although the literature review indicated that girls are being increasingly exploited by gangs in both Canada and the United States, the community consultation showed that there are few cases emerging in the Lower Mainland. The focus group participants agreed that the issue has the potential to grow, but at this point few of their female youth clients were known to be sexually exploited by gangs (and if so, the link to gangs was weak) – though this is difficult to ascertain due to the underground nature of the entrenched girls. Further, there is a stigma attached to reporting gang-related sexual exploitation, as well as the challenge of labeling – youth may not consider themselves or their boyfriends to be gang involved or label themselves as exploited. Sexual exploitation, rather than gang involvement, was the issue of primary concern for the girls who access the services provided by service providers at the focus groups.

However, research on sexual exploitation in British Columbia shows that gangs and organized crime may have an indirect impact on the levels of violence facing sexually exploited youth. For example, in Campbell River, participants in community-based research said that "the power struggles between competing gangs or groups can result in a noticeable escalation in violence" (Hunt 2006).

Additionally, service providers and youth participants emphasized the fact that when sexual exploitation is occurring as a result of gangs it goes underground and often involves moving those being exploited to different cities or even provinces (through human trafficking). Therefore, services are mostly reaching those at-risk of greater harm at the hands of a gang, and not reaching the girls who need them the most – those who have already gone underground. Participants in the focus groups in Maple Ridge noted that they knew of a number of girls who had become involved with gangs at which point they went underground and were assumed to have been moved to other communities or larger centres.

Sexualized Role of Girls in Gangs: Research suggests that girls are often placed within sexualized roles in the gangs they are involved in (Totten 2008). The inclusion of girls in gangs often involves their sexuality as the female members of a gang typically date a male member of the gang (Mackenzie and Johnson 2003). Whether a girl or young woman is dating a male member, or just associated with the gang, she is at risk of becoming a victim of sexual exploitation. Focus group participants confirmed that girls are socialized to not think of their own pleasure but to think of pleasing men that they are involved with.

Sexual Exploitation Through Gang “Business”: Some Canadian gangs engage in selling of sex as a part of their “business” endeavors (Dorais and Corriveau 2009). Dorais and Corriveau explain that experienced gangs know where and what to look for when recruiting young women: public and private schools, youth centres, malls, bus stations, train stations, rec rooms, concerts, video arcades, parks, sports venues, restaurants, and bars are all common recruitment sites. Troubled or run-away girls may be offered a place to sleep, food, and access to drugs. Finally, websites and chat rooms have been used to entice girls by offering careers as models or artists. In the community consultations in Abbotsford/Mission, participants said that they had seen a few incidents of sexual exploitation of girls in massage parlors, online sites, car dates (street-level exploitation), and strip clubs.

Sexual Exploitation and Recruitment through Parties: Gang members may advertise for a party they are throwing by giving away flyers at malls and areas frequented by teenage girls, inviting them to the party (Knox 2004). When girls arrive at the party, they are given alcohol and drugs, and later expected to pay for them through sex and sexual favours - examples of this type of exploitation were confirmed by focus group participants. One female respondent spoke of her initial contact with a gang, stating that, “I was introduced by a friend, partying at first and having sexual relations with gang members. I had to get gang raped/banged. I had to suffer through beatings to the point where I was laying on the floor bleeding.”

Forced Prostitution as a Gang Enterprise: Involves sexual exploitation and reflects intentional income-producing activity by the gang or its members (known as human trafficking). One focus group participant at each of the four focus groups and one of the interviewees provided examples of this occurring within the Lower Mainland. Service providers shared incidents of sexually exploited girls identifying as being directly exploited through a gang however, most of the reported sexual exploitation was not perceived as directly gang involved.

3.4 Heightened Vulnerability: At-Risk Groups of Girls

Though little information is available about the linkages between sexual exploitation and gangs in British Columbia, there is information available about the sexual exploitation of girls in British Columbia. In many ways this information can be extrapolated to the theme of gangs, girls and sexual exploitation in British Columbia. In a report completed by the Assistant Deputy Ministers' (ADM) Committee on Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Youth (2000), distinct subcultures in the sex trade were noted emerging in the urban areas, including the trafficking of Vietnamese girls in Vancouver, the trafficking of Sikh girls between Vancouver-area locations, and a trafficking circuit among cities in western US and Canada. The ADM's report also reported that anecdotal information indicated that Aboriginal youth were disproportionately involved in sexual exploitation and that the underlying issues differed in some significant ways from those relating to

non-Aboriginal youth (ADM's Committee, 2000). This topic will be expanded upon the section below, as an example of the Canadian minority groups involved in sexual exploitation within the province of British Columbia.

Aboriginal Girls' Involvement in Gangs: a Case Study of At-Risk Groups of Girls

In a 1999 report called *Sacred Lives: Canadian aboriginal children and youth speak out about sexual exploitation* (Kingsley and Mark 2000), widespread consensus emerged among community organizations, service providers, and front line agencies that the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal youth was increasing. At a provincial level, research on violence and sexual exploitation reported that Aboriginal communities across British Columbia are living with the impact of intergenerational violence and abuse stemming from residential school and other legacies of colonization (Hunt 2006). The normalization of violence in many Aboriginal communities puts youth at heightened risk of sexual exploitation and gang involvement, both of which have an underlying current of violence. These same risk factors put Aboriginal youth at heightened risk of gang involvement.

While most Aboriginal young people who grow up in high-risk environments do not become gang-involved, historical and situational factors contribute to the involvement of Aboriginal youths in gang activity:

“Aboriginals experience a disproportionate instance of suffering, and this helps explain their participation in gangs. Factors related to this include: racism, colonization, marginalization and dispossession; the loss of land, traditional culture, spirituality and values; and the breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal law. Girls and women are particularly vulnerable to gang recruitment in part, due to sexist and misogynistic values and practices in many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities” (Totten 2009).

Issues of poverty and lack of housing (Bittle et al. 2002, Dooley et al 2005), poor health conditions, high suicide rates (Shah 1990, York 1990, Statistics Canada 2001, Chandler et al. 2003), high rates of substance use (RCAP 1996), low educational attainment (Stats Can 2001; RCAP 1996), and high rates of institutionalization in the child welfare and mental health systems (Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson 2006, Trevethan et al. 2002, Blackstock et al. 2004) all contribute to the risk factors facing Aboriginal youth. Additionally, Aboriginal people are significantly over-represented in the justice system (Statistics Canada 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008b), including youth justice. Early involvement in the justice system makes Aboriginal youth less likely to report crimes against them because police are not seen as trustworthy (Hunt 2006).

A report by the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Youth (2000) estimates of the number of Aboriginal sexually exploited youth in British Columbia ranged from 14 % to 60% depending on the community – these statistics may or may not be linked to gang-related exploitation. Explanations for the range of estimates include regional and seasonal variability, the invisibility of the activity, and the incomplete state of knowledge about youth involvement (Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Youth 2000).

The sexual exploitation of Aboriginal youth is thought to be linked to the high numbers of Aboriginal girls and women who continue to go missing at an alarming rate from rural and urban areas across British Columbia and nationally (NWAC 2007; Sethi, 2007)

4. Prevention and Intervention Models

Gang membership does not happen overnight. Research shows that youth typically hang out with gang members for some time – often as much as a year – before making a commitment to join (Miller 2001). Given this information, the need to determine effective strategies to prevent/intervene, as well as support at-risk girls are great. Much can be learned from efforts to address sexual exploitation in British Columbia, which has called for the development of a continuum of services in communities across British Columbia (ADM's Committee, 2000). This continuum was described in *Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Innovative Ideas for Working with Children and Youth* (JIBC 2002) having six key areas:

Global prevention strategies: including policies to prevent the abuse of youth, education, housing, employment, public awareness, and healthy alternatives for at-risk youth.

Targeted prevention: including support for families, programs targeted to high-risk youth, professional training, mentoring programs for at-risk youth, counseling for youth in need of support, and residential drug and alcohol treatment.

Harm reduction: including “bad date” databases, supportive police protection, HIV prevention, needle exchange, STD testing, street outreach and emergency shelters.

Crisis intervention: including outreach to exploited and street-involved youth, mental health services for exploited youth, professional training for health care workers and suicide prevention and intervention services.

Programs to assist leaving: including programs for commercially sexually exploited youth to support them as they leave, reconnect programs, education and training programs for exploited youth, and financial support for youth who are leaving exploitative relationships or situations.

Programs to assist healing and reintegration: including ongoing economic assistance, life skills training, and ongoing emotional and psychological support.

Similarly, a range of programs and services are needed to address youth gang involvement. The research for this discussion paper focused primarily on prevention and intervention strategies and program models, although elements of the other areas of the continuum were mentioned in both the literature and community consultation.

Addressing Gangs, Girls and Sexual Exploitation in British Columbia: CAANs and CATs

The Provincial Youth Gang Prevention Strategy is one example of how the province is working to address youth gang involvement. The Inter-ministry Committee on Youth Violence and Crime in partnership with the National Crime Prevention Centre has implemented a four-year provincial strategy to prevent youth gang violence and crime with education, law enforcement, government, youth and community partners.

As part of this strategy, eight participating British Columbia communities have developed

Community Action and Assessment Networks (CAANs). These groups consist of a continuum of service providers working together to create community action plans to prevent youth involvement in gangs – these plans will be shared with other British Columbia communities.

Community Action Teams (CATs) are groups of service providers and community partners who are working to develop local strategies to address sexual exploitation. Activities include prevention, education, service coordination and legal/enforcement approaches.

CAANs and CATs are ideally set up to address links between gangs, girls and sexual exploitation; and they may consider collaborating on these themes as both come to the table with expertise on these topics.

The Rights of Children and Youth

A rights-based framework can be a useful foundation for developing program models to address youth sexual exploitation, as well as gang involvement. Sexual exploitation is one of many types of abuse that girls may face at the hands of gang members. The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* has been used as a framework for determining the responsibility that the Canadian government has to protect youth from these types of abuse. Additionally, *The Optional Protocol on Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography* recognizes that girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and that eliminating the occurrence of sexual exploitation requires a holistic approach that addresses the contributing factors for high-risk groups (including poverty and gender discrimination). Addressing these risk-factors would also lessen the chance that girls will become involved in gangs, as the pathways and risk-factors are similar.

Principles For Program Development

Several principles of promising practices will be explored below - including using a strengths-based approach, culturally relevant programming, and gender-specific programming. These principles emerge out of both the available literature on approaches to prevention and intervention with girls at risk of becoming involved in gangs, as well as that related to preventing sexual exploitation. Recognition of variations in young women's age, experiences, activities, and level of involvement within and across gangs is key to designing prevention and intervention strategies. Research suggests that gender-specific interventions may be useful - particularly in dealing with sexual assault and abuse (Miller 2009; Totten 2008). Intervention strategies must also be tailored to meet the diverse needs of female gang members, with sensitivity to ethnic and cultural differences.

In interviews and surveys collected from youth respondents, little information was given as to effective intervention and prevention strategies, although a number of programs were mentioned as providing support for at-risk girls in the Lower Mainland. One female focus group participant said, "you can't keep girls out of gangs. Especially if you are born into it, it's your life, who you are, all you know how to do. You can't warn, you can't prevent."

A follow up question was asked of the group: if we cannot prevent, how can we help? One youth stated that, "I would listen if someone my age was trying to help. She could say 'I've seen it, I've lived it, and it's not good,' I would listen to that – help needs to come from someone that has lived it."

Another youth focus group participant spoke of the things that supported her to exit a gang lifestyle, with specific focus on positive relationships she developed with police, school counselors and youth workers (See Section 4.2: Focus on Healthy Relationships).

4.1 Building Resilience: Supporting Positive Development of At-Risk Girls

Information on evaluated Canadian programs to combat the youth gang problem is scarce (Chatterjee 2006). The majority (60%) of these programs are located in either urban or rural Quebec and together, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba accounted for approximately 36 % of available programs (ibid). The basic premise for any prevention and intervention effort seems to be that programs must be targeted at providing at-risk and gang-involved girls with positive opportunities for fulfilling their needs. Chatterjee (2006) suggests that gang-reduction programs include:

- Support and counseling for families – especially for hard-to-reach families and communities of at-risk youth;
- Education and training for youth to earn an honest livelihood;
- Skills for conflict resolution; and recreational activities (e.g. after school programs) that give youth a healthy lifestyle alternative as well as a sense of self worth and respect;
- Anti-bullying programs - reducing adolescents' reliance on physical violence for power, thrill and excitement;
- Community mobilization - one of the most effective strategies in addressing gang problems. This implies garnering support and full participation of neighbourhood residents, churches, and educational/social/outreach agencies in both urban and rural communities, in all socio-economic levels and racially homogeneous or diverse neighbourhoods which are affected; and,
- Multi-faceted, multi-partner, comprehensive and balanced strategy to prevent, reduce and combat gang problems.

Spergel (1995) writes that youth workers need to operate at the grassroots, tenant and local agencies, public housing, and employment settings in the provision of a range of services both to older and younger youth involved in gangs or at-risk of involvement. The development of new arrangements for the delivery of a greater range of more complex outreach gang services requires a higher level of coordination across professional disciplines and types of agencies, better trained and educated workers, and a strong commitment to long-term research and evaluation to determine which social intervention arrangements and techniques are effective. He further observed that in creating social opportunities for younger children at risk, it would be extremely important to restructure schools so that they become community education facilities to serve the needs of parents as well. For adolescent gang involved youths, a valuable step would be to create a link between a well-structured learning experience and work opportunities – as a viable alternative to gang activities for survival. Similarly, for older youths and young adult gang members, it would be valuable to provide employment opportunities.

Spergel and Curry (1990) provide a comprehensive model to deal with youth and gangs: Community organization – meaning a collaborative effort by various community organizations to establish a healthy community; Social intervention – including crisis intervention, providing positive role models for youth, inter-gang mediation, counseling, assistance to leave gangs, and drug prevention and treatment; Opportunities provision – refers to providing youth, especially high-risk youth, with employment, employment training and education; and, Suppression – meaning a variety of enforcement activities such as employing special gang units, police patrols as well as legislation and prosecution.

Sexually exploited British Columbian youth identified several of their needs in the report *It's not what you think: sexually exploited youth in British Columbia*. Though no mention is made to whether or not the youth are gang involved, the needs are still very relevant to those who are gang

involved. In the street-involved survey of 2006 (Saewyc et al. 2008) youth were asked which available services they used and if they found these services helpful or not. The top 5 available services exploited youth accessed in 2006 were: youth clinics, food banks, shelters, soup kitchens and street nurses (Saewyc et al. 2008). The top 5 helpful people youth accessed, in the 2006 survey, were friends, youth outreach workers, social workers, family and doctors/nurses (Saewyc et al. 2008).

In a report by the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Youth (2000), informants described problems in current approaches, including inflexible bureaucratic rules and a slow, ineffective criminal justice system. A number of service needs were identified, such as increased outreach staff, youth addiction treatment services, residential mental health facilities, and safe housing for sexually exploited youth, (Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Youth 2000). Focus group and interview respondents, and workshop participants also identified these needs.

4.2 Approaches to Prevention and Intervention

Focus group and workshop participants said that developing healthy adult relationships is a key component of preventing girls from becoming gang involved and sexually exploited. These strong relationships also serve as a resource for girls when they are in need of help, such as when they are a victim of violence or exploitation. Coordinated services, increased outreach programs, and a full continuum of services were also seen as key to prevention and intervention efforts.

Focus on Healthy Relationships: During an interview, one youth spoke of the intervention methods that helped her to get out of the gang-involved lifestyle she was living in. She emphasized positive relationships, saying that her friends and the school counselor were helpful. The school counselor referred her to Kevin Murray (Formerly Abbotsford Police Youth Squad and ICE), who was able to refer her to a SEY outreach worker. She told us that the Police association, as well as her SEY worker gave her a feeling of trust and safety, despite the activities she was involved in (street trade, prostitution) – “I trusted Kevin [APD], therefore I trusted Bev [SEY worker], and they were always there for me, no matter what.” She stated that, “My SEY worker was a good listener and always there for me” – it was this availability that helped her to make positive choices and change her life.

Several respondents emphasized that some girls do not access these resources because of fear of retaliation from their abusers. Research indicates that girls are more likely to access help from someone they know and trust (Hunt 2006).

One key idea provided by workshop participants is that prevention/intervention programs need to offer both male and female service providers, so that girls can develop healthy relationships with members of each gender. Male and Female service providers should also work to teach the girls about appropriate male/female relationships.

Coordinated Services: Service providers involved in the focus groups and interviews were able to affirm the research presented in the literature review for prevention and intervention methods, including emphasis of the importance of interconnectivity of services.

Outreach in Schools: Service providers emphasized the importance of having youth workers in all middle and high schools in the province of British Columbia. The youth workers should work in

conjunction with school counselors, staff and principals. Together, these adults can identify at-risk and high-risk girls, as well as identify those already involved with gangs and/or being sexually exploited. At-risk girls need to be targeted before they become involved in gangs and/or sexually exploited.

Screening Process: Workshop participants emphasized that screening is needed to insure that youth are receiving the proper level of prevention/intervention strategies, so as to not connect with youth who may be more gang or criminally involved than they are. Examples were shared of youth making negative connections with other youth at treatment, detention, and other youth centres. These negative connections may lead to the reintegration or increased involvement of youth in activities the strategies above are working to address. These risks can be mitigated by service provider awareness and a proper screening process.

Lower Mainland Services

Although a full survey of British Columbia youth services goes beyond the scope of this project, a number of programs were mentioned in the community consultations that fall along the continuum of service provision and provide different examples of program models. Service providers identified these programs as working well to address youth gangs and sexual exploitation. The services can be grouped together under the following types of program models:

Education	Community Action and Assessment Networks Sexual exploitation prevention through education
Prevention	Gender-specific programming (girls groups) Alternative schools Employment skills programs Mentoring (both peer and intergenerational mentoring) Multi-purpose youth centres
Intervention	Wraparound intervention for sexually exploited youth and youth at risk of gang involvement Faith-based counseling Safe houses High-risk case coordination
Services Across the Continuum	Provincial support for youth who are sexually exploited (Government funding) and youth at risk of gang involvement

4.3 Culturally-specific Program Models: Aboriginals in British Columbia as an Example

Little research is available on culturally-specific program models for immigrant and refugee communities, as well as other marginalized cultural groups. However, recent attention to programming for Aboriginal youth has led to the development of some culturally-relevant program models for gang prevention in Aboriginal communities. Both of the projects described below have an emphasis on hiring Aboriginal staff teams, preferably those who have direct life experience in

gangs, the sex trade and street life. Male and female Elders are employed in each project. The programs are gender-responsive, culturally competent, and have the capacity to respond 24 hours daily, year-round.

The Warrior Spirit Walking Project, delivered by the Prince Albert Outreach Program Inc., targets 12-20 year-old Aboriginal gang members and youth at high-risk of gang membership. The Circle of Courage model is the foundation for all programs, including: Won-Ska Cultural School; Youth Activity Centre; van outreach to sexually exploited youth; Presentation Team; court outreach; intensive counseling; Youth Women's Group; and employment services (Totten 2009).

The North Central Community Association's **Regina Anti-Gang Service project (RAGS)** targets 16-28 year-old gang leaders and their partners/family members. Core Services are based upon the Aboriginal Medicine Wheel, and the Wraparound and Multi-systemic Therapy (MST) models, including: gender-specific life skills groups; intensive individual, crisis, and family counseling; gang exit (geographic relocation with intensive supports); and outreach to gang-involved young persons in correctional institutions, court, and inner city schools (North Central Community Association 2006).

4.4 Gender-specific Program Models

Gender-specific programs are called for in literature on preventing girls' involvement in gangs and/or sexual exploitation. Girls groups are one program model that has been seen by both practitioners and researchers as being effective in reaching at-risk girls, because of the emphasis on developing healthy relational skills and creating a safe environment in which to talk about difficult issues (Bell-Gatsby, Clark and Hunt 2006).

Program Model: SNAP Girls Connection

The SNAP Girls Connection is an Ontario-based program taking a prevention approach to girls' involvement in gangs. Through helping violent girls deal with their aggression, the organization is preventing many girls from becoming gang involved.

“SNAP Girls Connection works collaboratively with a multidisciplinary team to conduct ongoing research initiatives designed to inform understanding of the development of aggression among young girls and provide an evidence-based, gender sensitive model of intervention for dissemination. The objective of the SNAP Girls Connection is to develop, administer, and evaluate an empirically-driven therapeutic program to reduce aggression and keep girls out of trouble and in school” (SNAP 2008).

This program has identified unique, gender specific risks to gang involvement, as well as protective factors that may help them avoid gangs. Early risk factors impact healthy development of girls in key areas: academic failure, behaviour problems across domains, poor connection with mothers/other important adults and social marginalization (SNAP 2008). Not having mastered primary developmental tasks, these girls may experience multiple risks which then put them at heightened risk of gang involvement (such as estrangement from families, substance use, and membership in negative peer groups).

The girls involved in the SNAP Girl Connection program are being given the tools to aid in hindering of their aggression, and thus, also becoming less at-risk for gang involvement.

5. Identified Gaps and Suggested Next Steps

Participants in the community consultation process were asked to identify their priority areas for expanded service delivery, as well as other factors they think would improve the capacity to reach girls at risk of gang involvement and/or sexual exploitation.

5.1 Gaps in the Continuum of Services

As outlined in Section 4.2, a range of services are available for at-risk girls in British Columbia (and particularly in the Lower Mainland, where this study was focused). However, service providers identified several priority areas where change is needed. A summary of these are listed below (See Appendix 3 for complete list of identified gaps):

Housing/Beds: More age and gender-specific housing and emergency shelter beds for girls. Youth safe house services should follow the Standards for Safe House Services in British Columbia, as developed by Youth Services, Child and Youth Mental Health and Youth Justice Division – MCFD. Adoption of these standards could start to address some of the housing and bed concerns for gang involved and/or sexually exploited young women in British Columbia.

Wraparound services: More drop-in centres, coordinated intervention programs, and family-based programs.

Transition Services: Programs for girls who are ‘aging’ out of youth programs are needed, for young adults age 19-25 years.

Youth Workers: More youth workers, peer support programs, after school programs, school counselors, and general outreach workers are needed where girls already hang out (including online).

Early Identification and Prevention: Services for girls under age 12 are needed - early intervention approaches must include a coordinated approach.

Funding: Funding is a priority in all areas of youth services. Service providers advocated for 24/7 services and for the expansion of services to youth both below age 12 and above age 19. More funding should be extended to street outreach workers, as they can act as the first line of defense against recruitment. Outreach workers also have to potential to access those girls already deeply entrenched in the life, where conventional services cannot.

Awareness and Education: Increased awareness is needed for all stakeholders, community members, children and youth, as well as businesses that may come in to contact with at-risk youth.

6. Closing Words

This paper has strived to answer four key questions:

- Why and how do girls become involved in/linked with gangs?
- What are the various roles girls play in/through gangs including links to sexual exploitation?
- What are individual, family, peer, school and community strengths/assets that support girls to resist gang/sexual exploitation involvement and build resiliency?
- What are effective gender and culturally responsive strategies for prevention, intervention and supporting the positive development of at-risk girls?

The key finding of this paper is that girls who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation are similarly vulnerable to gang involvement. Common risks for girls include: a history of victimization; school issues; lack of basic needs; unstable family life; a history of unhealthy dependent relationships; mental health issues and other hidden disabilities; substance misuse; lack of healthy adult relationships; normalized violence; intergenerational involvement in gangs; loitering; and marginalization.

Our research indicates that the role of Canadian girls in gangs may be changing. Some female gang members have shifted from tertiary roles to more active roles, such as drug dealing, recruiting and violent crime (enforcing, calling in drug debts). Girls also continue to perform traditional female roles, such as sexual favors; dating a male member of the gang; carrying stolen goods, weapons and drugs; and, answering “the phone.” As a result gang-related violence against girls and women is no longer off limits (See Section 2.2). Finally, girls and women are intentionally sexually exploited via profit producing gang enterprise.

Through consultations and workshops with service providers we identified potential gaps in services and opportunities for improving services that include: early identification and prevention. We believe the most effective prevention and intervention strategies/programs are: gender-specific, culturally relevant, evidence-based, and innovative. Several principles of promising practices were explored for program development, including using a strengths-based approach, as well as, culturally relevant and gender-specific programming. The basic premise for any prevention and intervention effort seems to be that programs must be targeted at providing at-risk and gang-involved girls with positive opportunities for fulfilling their needs (social, emotional, physical and financial). Essentially we need to offer what recruiters and gang members can offer the girls as a viable alternative to gang activities for survival. Programming must be multifaceted, multi-partner, and comprehensive, mobilizing the entire community. It should include aspects such as: counseling, education, employment opportunities, positive recreational activities, healthy adult relationships, exit assistance, and fulfillment of basic needs.

Finally, we would like to suggest additional questions for consideration and recommendations for potential next steps.

7. Recommendations and Questions for Future Exploration

The research completed as part of this consultation is of a very preliminary nature. There is a great deal more research needed under the theme of girls, gangs and sexual exploitation in British Columbia. As this consultation was completed over a short period of time and limited to the Lower Mainland, it does not provide a thorough description of gang related sexual exploitation of girls in British Columbia. Research needs to be completed in more regions of the province and with a

more diverse scope of participants to provide a clear picture of gangs, girls and sexual exploitation throughout the province.

7.1 Recommendations

1. **More research** is necessary under the following themes: links between sexual exploitation and gang activities in British Columbia; non-traditional risk factors to girls' gang involvement and sexual exploitation in British Columbia; gang-related sexual exploitation of males; evidence-based prevention and intervention program models that address the intersection between gangs and sexual exploitation that are gender-specific and culturally relevant; and roles that girls and women play in British Columbia gangs.
2. **Comprehensive list of services** available to gang involved and/or sexually exploited youth. This list should be inclusive of all regions and cities in the province.
3. **Increasing the effectiveness of prevention/intervention programs** should be investigated, acknowledging current programming and building on successes to increase: gender-specific, culturally relevant, evidence-based, innovative (i.e. youth to youth) programs and services for gang involved and/or sexually exploited girls.
4. **Continuum of services** should be developed utilizing existing programs, while also addressing gaps in programming to ensure a full continuum of gender-specific, culturally relevant services. The continuum should include: global prevention strategies, targeted prevention, harm reduction, crisis intervention, programs to assist leaving, and programs to assist healing and reintegration.
5. **Communication** - Focus group and workshop participants emphasized the need for improved communication between service providers, city police, and RCMP, as well as, improved communication within and across communities.

7.2 Questions for Future Exploration

The following questions are examples areas of further discussion for future research:

1. How can we begin to reach girls involved in gangs who are not currently accessing services? What services are necessary to help those girls who are deeply entrenched/underground exit, and reintegrate back into everyday life?
2. What are all aspects needed to create culturally responsive, gender-specific prevention/intervention programs for girls at-risk of gang-related sexual exploitation?
3. Can existing sexual exploitation and gang prevention/education programs integrate an awareness of the link between gangs and sexual exploitation?
4. Are there examples of effective, evidence-based prevention/intervention methods/programs from other provinces and countries that could be applied in British Columbia?

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Appendix 1: Interview Participants

The following people participated in one-to-one interviews as part of the community consultation for this project:

- Sgt. Shinder Kirk, Abbotsford Police Department Gang Task Force and formerly, Surrey Wrap Project.
- A sitting member of the Vancouver Community Action Assessment Network (CAAN) – this individual wished to remain anonymous.
- Cst. Mark Zawadsky of the Abbotsford Police Department Youth Squad
- Cst. Kevin Murray of the Abbotsford Police Department Youth Squad and ICE Program.
- Derek Black, Outreach worker with Surrey Wraparound as well as voluntarily runs a drop-in recreation program for Abbotsford youth. Formerly a PO in the United States, worked in Northern California Wraparound project.
- Cpl. Mike Moyer, Aboriginal Gang Coordinator and Aboriginal Policing Media Relations Officer – Vancouver, Greater Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia.
- Bev Shields – Abbotsford Youth and Family worker with the Stop Exploiting Youth (SEY) program.
- Amir Javid – Richmond CAAN member; in charge of Street Smarts Program for gang involved youth in Richmond.
- Youth 1 – Female youth in Abbotsford; formerly sexually exploited.
- Youth 2 – Female youth in Abbotsford; currently sexually exploited.

Appendix 2: Emerging Issues in British Columbia Youth Gang Prevention Workshop, March 24, 2010: World Café Responses

Introduction

As part of this consultation, a workshop was held on March 24, 2010. At the workshop key findings of this paper were presented, and workshop participants were given the opportunity to participate in an interactive activity. A World Café model was used to engage workshop participants, and collect their knowledge on a number of themes from this paper.

Questions the participants were asked to comment on were:

1. Given that sexual exploitation occurs in many different ways throughout the province of British Columbia, what are the links between the sexual exploitation of girls and gang association/involvement?
2. What are the risk factors and pathways to the gang-related sexual exploitation of girls in British Columbia?
3. What are the roles girls play in gangs in British Columbia?
4. What are examples of current resources/services that prevent involvement in, or support girls who are sexually exploited and/or gang involved? (If possible, please provide full information for each service – i.e. web links, full organization name, etc.)
5. Please identify gaps in services required to meet the needs of sexually exploited and/or gang involved girls in British Columbia (consider cultural, emotional, physical, social, psychological factors)?
6. What are all of the aspects needed to create culturally responsive, gender-specific prevention/intervention programs for girls at-risk of gang-related sexual exploitation?
7. What are all of the aspects needed to create culturally responsive, gender-specific intervention and rehabilitation programs for girls currently being sexually exploited as a result of gang association/involvement?

Workshop World Café Responses

1. Given that sexual exploitation occurs in many different ways throughout the province of British Columbia, what are the links between the sexual exploitation of girls and gang association/involvement?
 - Money
 - Sex and drugs
 - Lured by glamour of gang life – media
 - Unrealistic ideas about relationships/way of thinking in gangs
 - Basic needs
 - Sense of belonging
 - Lack of family connections
 - Low self worth

- Love and attention
- Protection
- Clothing
- Shelter
- Food
- Emotionally unstable – looking for connection, protection (perceived benefits out-weigh costs)
 - Especially given history of abuse
 - Relationships within gangs dissolve – protection/father figure = a debt to the gang
- Supervision at home/role models
- Too much control at home – gang = freedom
 - Gang involvement provides opportunity to “control” at least one aspect of my life
- Girls seen as an easy target
 - Physically, emotionally weaker
 - Child maltreatment
 - Desire material goods
 - Recruited girls are getting younger
 - Recruitment parties
- Economics
 - Power, ability to improve economic situation and power and freedom
- MCFD
 - Lack of proper care/compassion
 - Accountability
 - Good homes/exit/skilled workers
- Idea
 - Programs that offer positive male role models
- Female recruiters
- Recruitment
 - Happens in facilities (continues bad cycles)
 - Drop-in centres = recruitment
- Gangs have networks – move girls from place to place
- Peer Pressure/Bullying
 - Facebook page set up to ostracize a particular girl in a community or school

- Pay back drug debts
2. What are the risk factors and pathways to the gang-related sexual exploitation of girls in British Columbia?
- Generational abuse
 - Educational gaps – therefore look for other ways to make money
 - Group homes/juvi – connecting to gang related youth/house mates
 - Dependency on alcohol and drugs
 - Lack of sense of belonging
 - Lack of family and community connections
 - Lack of acceptance in family, school and community
 - Desire for social acceptance
 - Technology
 - Desensitization to risks
 - Previous trouble with the law
 - Parents
 - Absent
 - Normalized violence
 - Mental health issues
 - History of sexual exploitation
 - Desire for material goods
 - Attraction to the “bad boy”
 - Have been groomed
 - Substance misuse
 - Intergenerational family involvement
 - Gang affiliated peers
 - Desire for a sense of security and protection
 - Lack of a positive adult role model
 - Boredom and lack of extracurricular activities
 - Lack of pro-social activity
 - Media influence (image, excitement)
 - Want to emulate
 - Bullying (girls may be victims of)
 - Academically challenged
 - Low level of achievement

- Drop out
 - No connection to school
 - Lack of supports/services
 - Recruitment parties
 - Attitude that sex = power
3. What are the roles girls play in gangs in British Columbia?
- Recruitment
 - Accounting
 - Violent crimes
 - Caregiver = den mother
 - Transport goods, drugs, members
 - Pimping
 - “Spy” at other rival gang member parties
 - counter surveillance
 - Messenger
 - Trophy and/or sexual favours
 - Answering phones
 - Intimidation, assaulting other girls
 - “Social” bullying
 - Status – girls “hot” makes the gang look good
 - Taking or holding drugs
 - Stealing
 - Carrying weapons
 - Drug dealing/trafficking/transportation
 - Using female names for assets (credit cards, cars, houses, cell phones, etc.)
 - Confidant
 - Attraction of males to the group – show them a good time
 - Entertainers
 - Enforcers
 - Pimps
 - Girlfriends
 - Look out
 - Crack shack operators

- Cover what is really going on – portray a social norm
 - Anger outlets
4. What are examples of current resources/services that prevent involvement in, or support girls who are sexually exploited and/or gang involved? (If possible, please provide full information for each service – i.e. web links, full organization name, etc.)
- Alexandria House
 - Association for Women and Children (AWAC)
 - British Columbia/Yukon Transition Houses
 - Career Path
 - Carnegie
 - CASEY – Communities Against Sexual Exploitation of Youth
 - Children of the Street
 - Choices Programs
 - City of Burnaby Sexual Exploitation Committee
 - Crime Stoppers
 - Elizabeth Fry
 - Front Room (Surrey)
 - Genesis House
 - Hard Target – Vancouver
 - Hustle
 - IRAYL – Outreach on transit and skytrain
 - Justice for Girls
 - Kla Haweya – Aboriginal Friendship Centres
 - Langley Youth and Family Services
 - LOVE
 - MCFD – YAGS – CYMH
 - Mental Health Team
 - New Hope – drop in centre in Prince George. Run by peers
 - Options/Options – Surrey
 - Outreach workers
 - Peers – women exiting the sex trade
 - PGNFC – Prince George Native Friendship Centre
 - Phoenix Transition House
 - PLEA – ONYX

- Police
 - RCMP
 - City Police
 - Transit police – Yankee 10/20
 - Burnaby Youth Services
 - ICE Program
 - Richmond Youth Intervention Program
 - Surrey Youth Intervention Program
- Probation
- Purpose Society
- Reconnect
- S.O.S
- SACY – USB Program
- School-based counselors
- SEY – Stop Exploiting Youth
- SOLO’s – safe online outreach
- Specialized victim’s services for girls and women going through the court system (Abbotsford)
- St. Leonard’s sexual exploitation workers (Burnaby)
- Surrey Youth Clinic
- SWIS – Settlement Workers in Schools (Vancouver school board)
- TOC² – school-based education
- Umoja – Surrey
- Watari – www.watari.org
- WAVAW – Women Against Violence Against Women
- Wraparound
- Y86 – police with a social worker
- Youth recreation programs
- Covenant Housing – exiting
- FSGV – Family Services of Greater Vancouver
- MAP Vancouver – Vancouver strolls
- Servants Anonymous
- UNYA

5. Please identify gaps in services required to meet the needs of sexually exploited and/or gang involved girls in British Columbia (consider cultural, emotional, physical, social, psychological factors)?
- **Housing/Beds (Emergency, recovery, transition)**
 - Long-term, stable residential placement/services
 - More safe houses
 - Many communities don't have them
 - Income assistance – needs an address to get, but need the money for the address
 - Lack of support post incarceration – youth go back to what they know if they don't know where to look for services
 - **Wraparound Services**
 - **Communication**
 - Needs to be more sharing between agencies/communities
 - Needs to be awareness of what other agencies/communities have to offer
 - Link services/resources in geographical areas
 - Share info between services and police in individual cities, and among cities
 - **Cultural Issues**
 - Cultural bridge – facilitator
 - Lack of multicultural youth workers
 - Language barriers among immigrant parents and youth to access services
 - Lack of cultural outreach and education
 - Lack of culturally based programs particularly for aboriginal female youth
 - Tweak existing programs to address cultural and gender issues
 - **Youth Workers**
 - No after hours and weekend workers
 - More youth workers
 - **Early Identification and Prevention**
 - Lack of after school/evening activities/programming for young girls
 - Early detection and prevention
 - Need to start earlier with our girls
 - Include self esteem building
 - More positive female role models/mentors (BBBS at younger ages – need more mentors for teens)
 - **Funding**

- Wait lists are too long
- Funding based on empirical evidence not youth's needs assessment
- Housing
- Education
- Training
- Lack of Wraparound services
- Lack of \$\$ compared to a gang
- **Awareness and Education**
 - Education of males (potential exploiters) at an earlier age
 - Women regarding their roles, rights and values – they are not second class citizens or commodities
 - Assertiveness training for girls at younger ages
 - Lack of programming to address gender roles for boys/girls and men/women – empower both girls and boys to act in a different way
 - All partners need to know what each other can provide
 - Youth so that they know about these issues
 - Within organizations and groups
 - Have a succession plan
- **Other**
 - MCFD and government - Policies and procedures not meeting the needs of the youth – not realistic
 - Foster Care
 - Support for foster homes not enough
 - Lack of training for foster homes
 - Parental support
 - Support for parents whose girls are at risk
 - Programs to help improve relationships between girls and their parent(s)
 - Denial of issues because it will bring shame to family etc.
 - Work with peers/experiential youth
 - Employment
 - Job opportunities/training
 - Goal setting

6. What are all of the aspects needed to create culturally responsive, gender-specific prevention/intervention programs for girls at-risk of gang-related sexual exploitation?

- **Global Prevention Strategies**
 - Reaching out to “cultural communities” such as Sikh Temples, Buddhist temples, churches and other religious and cultural community centres and being them info about sexual exploitation and gangs
 - Also, cultural sensitivity
 - Family dinners with workshops and parents present
 - Education (ESL, awareness, assessments)
 - Partnerships in community
 - Education
 - Learn about healthy male/female relationships from both genders
- **Targeted Prevention**
 - Support for families
 - Support to provide inclusivity/positive mentors
 - Self-esteem building – self reliance and self worth
- **Harm Reduction**
 - Online outreach
- **Crisis Intervention**
 - Low barrier/outreach programs that are easily accessible
 - Transition through prevention/maintenance/aftercare
- **Programs to Assist Leaving**
 - Residential – drug and alcohol resources
 - Housing and specialized facilities
- **Programs to Assist Healing and Reintegration**
 - Female workers/male workers
 - Positive male influences
 - Empowerment
 - Skills
 - Tools
 - Info
 - Housing and specialized facilities
- **Other Ideas**
 - Youth driven (identify needs)
 - Youth advisory committee
 - Culturally and language-specific workers
 - Cultural responsive training for workers

- Funding and support from government (and private sector)
 - Get families involved
 - Continuum of services
7. What are all of the aspects needed to create culturally responsive, gender-specific intervention and rehabilitation programs for girls currently being sexually exploited as a result of gang association/involvement?
- **Global Prevention Strategies**
 - Education
 - Start in schools with curriculum
 - Enhance self-esteem
 - Training/education for community/service providers re: sexual exploitation/risks/prevention
 - **Targeted Prevention**
 - Family supports
 - Counseling
 - Guardian/care giver/parent education
 - Signs
 - Taking about it
 - Early intervention
 - Getting younger, may be young than originally thought
 - Basic needs
 - Provide
 - Holistic approach
 - Programs need to meet needs of youth and not vice versa
 - Culturally and gender-specific programs
 - Address root causes: poverty, racism, fractured families
 - **Harm Reduction**
 - **Crisis Intervention**
 - Legal options
 - Education them
 - Protective intervention orders
 - Safe environment
 - Safe place to live
 - Confidentiality
 - Police

- Legal framework needs to be put into place to remove threat from girls' environment
- **Programs to Assist Leaving**
 - Peer support
 - Group activities/counseling
 - Speaking with other female youth who have exited – what worked for them
 - Protection resources
 - Safe exit strategies
 - Ensure safety
 - Housing
- **Programs to Assist Healing and Reintegration**
 - Strong and positive mothering – role model to exist in the rehab program
 - E.g. roots of empathy
 - Employment opportunities and skills training
 - To make money and succeed at going it = self worth
 - Enhance self-esteem
- **Other Ideas**
 - Funding
 - Modeling from other countries
 - What works
 - What doesn't work
 - Improved training/policy for MCFD – reuse and use best practices
 - Guardianship clause for youth to give own permission for services
 - Diversity among frontline workers
 - Culture, gender, experience
 - Subsidized daycare
 - Communication between services/agencies
 - MCFD/RCMP/front line/mental health/court systems
 - Gaps
 - Address gaps in services
 - Mental health
 - Social support
 - Education

Appendix 3: Service Gaps and Needs Identified by Service Providers at Focus Groups (Notes from Flip Charts) and Interviews

Housing/Beds

- More housing/beds for girls who need the help – this housing should be youth-specific
 - Housing for those exiting the lifestyle (gang and/or prostitution)
 - Emergency housing/beds
 - Housing that is not just for drug and alcohol addictions
- Extend the maximum length of stay at emergency and transition housing for exploited girls.
- There is a great need for housing/shelters for girls under the age of 12.
- There is a great need for housing/shelter for girls between the ages of 12-19. Most existing housing/beds are for adult women, and do not take girls.

Approaches

- Sgt. Shinder Kirk of the Abbotsford Police Department identified a need for a one-stop-shop such as Pathfinders, not a host of alternatives for youth. Other service providers said that this would not be a good idea because of rival gang or clique affiliations among youth. Having youth from many different rival groups in one place could have the potential for problems. Perhaps several one-stop-shop options within the Lower Mainland, and the greater province of British Columbia would be effective.
- Girls who are sexually exploited and/or gang involved need a “true” WRAP model where youth are provided with consistent intervention at all levels. Also more workers for WRAP are needed. Derek Black, Surrey WRAP, formerly California WRAP stated that in California the ratio was 1 worker to 3-5 youth. In Surrey WRAP, ratio is 2 workers to 37 youth.
- A comprehensive, coordinated, team approach must be taken – all service providers: youth workers, teachers, outreach workers, POs, can work cooperatively, gain the trust of the girl or young woman, as well as act as a family to her. Currently, there is a serious lack of communication between service providers.
- When youth are identified as being at- or high-risk, the entire family/community around/influencing that youth needs to be evaluated/supported including:
 - Looking into the youth’s family (MCFD involvement)
 - Looking into criminal activity of youth and family (police)
 - Looking into educational history of the youth (school)
- Services for young women aged 19 to 25 was identified as a need. Most young women age out of MCFD programming at 19. Many still need the support beyond the age of 19.
- Youth-to-youth style outreach. Youth respondents said that they would be more willing to listen to an experimental youth, now out of the life, than a social worker or police presentation.
- Counselors in the middle and high schools need better training to recognize signs that a girl

or young woman is involved in a gang and/or being sexually exploited.

- Service providers in Maple Ridge and Surrey emphasized a need for a Secure Care Act, similar to that of the Province of Alberta.
- Use Craigslist to advertise services for exploited and/or gang-involved girls – similar to the way in which pimps advertise girls online.
- Outreach workers need to “recruit” like gang members and/or pimps – offer the girls material goods, cigarettes, shelter etc.

Availability of Youth Workers

- Service providers were firm in the conviction that there needs to be more available youth workers, which in turn proves a need for more available funding to both pay the workers and run programs.
- More youth workers specializing in the 10-13 age group – this was identified as a serious lack in the Lower Mainland. Girls are becoming sexualized much earlier, and there is a need for workers who focus specifically in this age group. Also, there are no services available to exploited girls in this age group, as they are too young for existing programs.
- There is a need for secure positions for youth workers, as well as program sustainability. Movement of workers throughout the Lower Mainland creates discontinuity in the care of girls.

Early Identification and Prevention

- Early identification and action must take place, perhaps using a roundtable approach (cooperation among service providers and community members). In most cases service providers said that youth cannot become involved in programming to help them until they are involved in very negative behaviours, as there are not enough available youth workers to look into those youth who are just beginning to become at-risk. In this case, prevention was identified as the most effective strategy, though in the case of British Columbia there is barely enough funding for intervention.

Funding

- Funding so that outreach workers can provide girls with the same material goods as gangs offer. In this way girls can be rehabilitated after being essentially “recruited” by an outreach worker in the same way a gang member or pimp would. Also more funding for outreach workers in general is needed. Workers need to be able to compete with recruiters – they are 24/7, but workers cannot be 24/7 so they need to be able to offer food, clothing and shelter.
- More funding for existing programs, and the creation of more programs for girls who are exiting. Programs also need to be made available for those girls under the age of 19 – current programming has been identified as for 19+ only.
- More funding so that more youth workers can be hired. Many are over worked and underpaid. In many cases girls that are identified as being on the cusp of at-risk are pushed to the bottom of the pile and not addressed until they enter a negative lifestyle. More workers to deal with youth on the cusp would be an amazing preventative measure.

Awareness and Education

- More awareness and education for *all* stakeholders/service providers and the community at large – the community does not care about these kids/their families until the media brings it to their attention.
- Early prevention and education strategies are necessary. Children in elementary and middle should receive education about what sexual exploitation is, how pimps recruit, gang prevention education etc. It was suggested that the life skills or career and personal planning courses students take should have these theme integrated into the curriculum.
- Education of the public is important. Service providers suggested poster campaigns would be effective. Posters could be places on buses, in areas frequented by prostitutes and in areas where youth hang out.
- Education of those working in the service industry about indicators of sexual exploitation and/or gang involvement, so that they might report abuse to the proper authorities. Examples of those needing education are:
 - Hotel clerks
 - Check-out clerks at grocery stores – in one example provided by a service provider, a young girl was in line with an older man to purchase condoms. At one point the young girl spoke to the man she was with saying “are these going to come out of my pay?”
- Education of professionals about sexual exploitation of girls, so that they may act accordingly. For example, girls working as prostitutes are being sexually, emotionally, and psychologically abused by their pimps and those they service. Social workers (at all levels), lawyers, judges, and those working for the Ministry need to be aware of this abuse when working with girls being charged with prostitution.

Law and Policing

- More training around Section 28 and 98 for social workers, judges and police.
- Bring back the Provincial Prostitution Unit – its multi-office approach made them experts
- Service providers at the Port Coquitlam focus group said that police officers specializing in youth and/or sexual exploitation would be of great help.