



Sex industry slavery: Protecting Canada's youth—A book review

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Robert Christmas.

Sex industry slavery: Protecting Canada's youth. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. 277 pp. <https://utorontopress.com/us/sex-industry-slavery-2>

INTRODUCTION

It was an incredible honour to be asked by the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being's* Editor in Chief, Norm Taylor, to review a newly published book by Robert Christmas entitled *Sex Industry Slavery: Protecting Canada's Youth*. The enclosed comments are mine alone and do not necessarily represent those of the Halton Regional Police Service. Reading about the lived experiences of survivors is difficult. I can only imagine how impactful conducting the research and sharing the stories through the written word would be for the writer. Dr. Robert Christmas is to be commended for his ability to take a difficult topic and introduce the reader, who may have little prior knowledge, to the realities of the issue. In sharing the details of survivors' stories, he helps cultivate empathy, reminding us that these are real people. Each unique story highlights the diversity of people and experiences, and yet, throughout the book, commonalities are identified. We know that in order to have safe communities we need to address systemic issues in our institutions, educate ourselves and those around us, and deliver tangible results. Dr. Christmas takes the experiences of the many participants who agreed to be interviewed as part of his research and uses their stories to create a roadmap the reader can follow to the end of the book, where he shares recommendations going forward. He is to be applauded for bringing together perspectives from a variety of subjects, including survivors, workers from government agencies mandated with public safety, political and Indigenous leaders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with knowledge of the sex industry.

As an Anishinaabe Kwe, I understand the power of storytelling. It can be healing for both the person who shares and the listener. It can also be influential. For all who shared

their thoughts, I am confident it is their hope this book will have a transformative impact on cultural attitudes, public policy, and social change. On a personal note, the stories will stay with me and will help guide my own discussions when it comes to delivering policing services to the community.

The Reviewer's Perspective as a Police Professional: Why the Words We Use Matter

As a police professional, my perspective has been influenced not only by my 29 years of policing experience but also by the fact of being an Indigenous woman. I have served in a number of roles throughout my career, and, as a front-line officer, I was a "First Responder" for complaints of sexual assault, the first officer with whom a victim of a sexual assault will usually meet. The role did not come with a lot of training, and I was likely chosen based on my gender and an institution that welcomes women but often keeps us tethered to traditional roles within a patriarchal system. I also spent time in criminal investigations, where I was assigned to the Persons Portfolio, which investigated sexual assaults, child abuse, and family violence occurrences. That was in the early 2000s and while I pride myself on always trying to help and comfort victims, at that time we never received trauma-informed training or paid much attention to how our language and the words we used could cause harm. We now know that language matters—especially for people who use substances and for survivors who have been exploited or trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Negative language discriminates, making victims and survivors feel isolated and alone.

Dr. Christmas from the outset discusses how critical the language we use around sex trafficking and sexual exploitation is. The research in this book sheds "light on the dispute between those who view prostitution as a legitimate profession of choice and those who hold that prostitution necessarily involves exploitation and victimization" (p. 29). He writes that it "frames the debate around voluntariness and whether people can freely choose to sell their bodies for sex" (p. 9). Several of the experiences that are shared in the book are those of children, and, as a parent myself, I find it unfathomable to even think that there could be any debate

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about voluntariness. While I acknowledge there may be merit in the discussion surrounding voluntariness, to debate it here is outside of the scope of my review.

Dr. Christmas himself was also open to this controversy. He writes, "At the outset, I anticipated each side of the debate would have a large number of adherents, possibly equal numbers. I found, however, that interviewees strongly feel that working in the sex industry is not a choice that children make—that young people wind up in the sex industry as a result of a lack of resilience in the face of predators who manipulate, coerce and threaten them" (225). Although the word "slavery" wasn't often used by the survivors who recounted their stories, the recruitment tactics, threats, and abuse endured meets the definition. Dr. Christmas was careful in his choice of language, and it was evident that it was most important to choose words that would respect the dignity of the people he was writing about.

As the Commander of the Regional Community Mobilization Bureau, I oversee Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. We spend a considerable amount of time addressing the concept of stigma and how we can potentially impact outcomes by choosing our words carefully. I vividly remember a young officer who clearly understood this as he recounted this story: while he was working with a young female victim of an assault who was also being sex-trafficked, she told him that it bothered her that the cops she had dealt with thought she was a prostitute. When this young officer approached numerous other officers and asked them to change the language in their reports to "victim of human trafficking," all but one understood the significance of this. They had used "prostitute" because others before them had, and this is what they saw in the database. They agreed that it changed the way in which they dealt with the victim. But one officer refused. He rebuffed the idea that language and how we label someone plays a significant role in how we interact with each other. The situation escalated and was addressed by a supervisor who, luckily, understood how important this was. The final report was changed. When the officer told the young victim, she was elated, and for the first time in her interactions with police, she began to develop a little glimmer of trust.

Beyond Truth and Reconciliation: An Urgent Need for Targeted Work

My own post-secondary education has been focused on Indigenous Studies and Equity, Diversity, and Human Rights. An Indigenous person myself, I grew up in an urban area, my father a police officer and my mother a school secretary. My grandmother, very much aware of the Indian Residential School (IRS) system that was in place, never spoke outside of the home about our cultural background for fear her children would be removed from the home. My connection to Indigenous language, culture, and ceremony has been taught to me through a combination of excellent educators, elders, and the urban Indigenous women whom I now call my sisters.

In chapter two, Dr. Christmas describes his experience of taking part in a blanket exercise and the emotional impact it had on him. He writes, "I was so shaken that I cried, realizing in many ways not much has changed" (p. 83). Birth outcomes amongst Indigenous peoples remain consistently less favourable than among the non-Indigenous population. For females born Indigenous and poor, Dr. Christmas describes it as the

cards being "stacked against you from the start" (p. 83). My first policing assignment was in Northern Ontario with the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP). The inequities between those living in the Town of Marathon, where I was posted, and the two First Nations Communities in the area were striking. The marginalization of Indigenous people and the impoverishment of the reserves were eye-opening to someone who was raised in an urban community in central Ontario. Housing and food security were lacking, and instead of treating addiction from a health perspective, it was managed, albeit poorly, using enforcement and incarceration.

The National Inquiry's final report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) revealed the need for transformative legal and social changes. Canada's staggering rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and the LGBTQ2S community is a direct result of patriarchal policies that have left them vulnerable to sex industry slavery. Dr. Christmas shares research conducted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) across Canada, which showed an upward trend in Indigenous victimization from 1980 to 2012 across a variety of categories. These include heinous crimes, such as murder, but also social disparity issues, such as disability insurance, addiction, and engaging in illegal activities for financial support. The RCMP found "12% of murdered Indigenous women had known involvement in the sex industry." This research, coupled with the work of Dr. Christmas, connects the relationship between ongoing economic hardship, colonization as gendered oppression and a "continuing movement around missing and murdered Indigenous women" (p. 86). The 231 individual Calls for Justice that came out of the MMIWG inquiry speak to the urgent need to overhaul "the daily encounters with individuals, institutions, systems, and structures that compromise" the safety, security and human rights of Indigenous peoples (MMIWG 2019).

Another area that resonated with me was Dr. Christmas's research on the social challenges faced by Indigenous people who are raised in isolated rural reserves and then move to larger urban centres. This was a phenomenon my son witnessed first-hand during an educational opportunity he had at the Royal Military College (RMC) in Kingston, Ontario. Chosen as one of 25 students across the country to participate in a year-long program called ALOY (Aboriginal Leadership Opportunity Year), his roommate was a young man from Grise Fjord, Nunavut. A small Inuit hamlet on the southern tip of Ellesmere Island, Grise Fjord is an isolated place with a population of only 130 inhabitants. While the lure of the big city was appealing, the reality was overwhelming to this young man, and my son's roommate left the program only four weeks into his year. Many rural communities across the country lack educational opportunities "so (Indigenous) youth frequently have to leave their family and community to attend high school in larger urban centres" (p. 89). This transition can create an adverse combination where young people are removed from the social connections of their community, lack support and/or the knowledge to access support in the city, and many may already be dealing with transgenerational trauma (p. 89). All of this creates opportunities for traffickers who prey upon vulnerable children.

In my current portfolio, two of the many areas I oversee are Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and Mobile Crisis Rapid

Response Teams (MCRRT). I sit on numerous internal and external committees grappling with social issues such as the opioid crisis, mental health and addiction and policing with Indigenous Peoples. Recently I was made aware of an incident involving an Indigenous woman attending college in Oakville, Ontario. She was from an isolated fly-in First Nation community and she experienced a mental health episode that resulted in a police response. The responding MCRRT team recognized the opportunity to provide culturally appropriate services and connected her with the urban Indigenous community. This is just one example of the kinds of changes in response that Dr. Christmas calls for throughout his book.

Peacekeeping: Over-Protecting and Under-Policing Vulnerable Populations

Living and working in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), my colleagues and I are very much alive to the urgent need to address the crime of human sex trafficking. The GTA is near all major transportation routes and an international airport, making it the largest sex trafficking hub in the Canada. Dr. Christmas's research focuses primarily on Manitoba, but the lessons learned and the recommendations in the book can be applied across the country. Dr. Christmas points out a key finding in his research is "that the trauma that survivors endure causes damage that can take a very long time to undo, and this recovery takes unique resources" (p. 224). He provides critical insight into challenges and barriers that sex industry survivors face, and confirmed my own beliefs about child welfare. Of his research he writes, "the participants highlighted the need for a paradigm shift in child welfare, suggesting that the child should not, unless absolutely necessary, be removed from the family home and support systems" (p. 227).

Although he ends the book on a positive note, the sex industry is complex and multi-faceted and the solutions need to be too. This book is a valuable resource and offers tangible actions that will contribute positively. I encourage educators,

police officers, and anyone else who wants to be part of the solution to read it.

To conclude, I leave you with this. My son is a Peace Keeper (Police Officer) with the Nishnawbe Aski Police Service (Canada's largest Indigenous Police Service) and is posted to a remote First Nations community on James Bay, Ontario. We talk often about the challenges of policing for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous officers, for those assigned to large urban centres and for those working in isolated communities. I usually end our phone calls by reminding him that putting on his uniform and serving his community is a privilege, that by responding to an incident or answering a call, he gets to be a part of someone's experience, and that the expectation is he will contribute to it in a positive way. This is true whether the person he is facing is a survivor, a victim, a community member, a colleague, or a person in conflict with the law. We talk about being kind and serving with compassion. We have also talked extensively about this book and his role and responsibility as a police professional in protecting Canada's youth.

Miigwech (thank you). Aangwaamzik (be safe).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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