

What Helps Most in Addressing Human Trafficking?

You may have heard broad messages about human trafficking.

Let's take a closer look.

Is Trafficking Everywhere?

No, but here are some reasons why it seems this way:

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1. More and more issues are being called human trafficking—intimate partner violence, online child exploitation, child abuse, kidnapping, etc.—making it seem like trafficking is more common than it is.

While these issues can sometimes overlap with trafficking, each of them has a unique legal definition and appropriate responses. Mislabeling them and calling them all 'trafficking' blurs the line between them, overlooks important differences, and can result in responses that do not meet people's needs.

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2. We live in a time of viral social media, where alarming stories spread like wildfire and people may believe them without evidence.

In recent years, British Columbia RCMP have issued statements debunking viral stories about [traffickers luring women in mall parking lots](#), [alleged trafficking-related kidnappings](#), and [claims that traffickers blocked a road with rocks](#). Stories like these can make trafficking seem like it's happening everywhere.

The idea that 'trafficking is everywhere' feels urgent, but it distracts from the reality that trafficking is most likely to happen in situations where people are vulnerable and don't have real choices—because of things like poverty, unsafe work, lack of housing, immigration status, etc.

So, how much trafficking is there?

The Canadian government does not publish a comprehensive report on human trafficking every year¹. As a result, Canada does not have accurate statistics. It can be difficult to collect accurate data, including for the following reasons²:

- › Different groups use different definitions of human trafficking, which makes it hard to compare information.
- › Human trafficking is often confused with other issues, such as sex work or unhealthy relationships.
- › Some forms of trafficking—especially sex trafficking—receive more attention than others, like labour trafficking or forced criminality.
- › There is no consistent or widely accepted way to collect and track human trafficking data.

Unfortunately, too often the focus is placed on victims not reporting—a form of victim blaming—instead of recognizing the many reasons that make it difficult to gather accurate statistics, such as what we’ve listed above.

But no matter how much trafficking there is, we still need more effective solutions and for victims and survivors to have their needs met.

Even with all the funding and attention on anti-trafficking, we are still hearing that trafficking is getting worse and worse every year. Whether this is true or not, it’s clear we need to do something differently to address it.

Is Everyone At Risk?

This common oversimplification gives the impression that trafficking occurs randomly.

While it’s true that victims and survivors don’t look a specific way or come from one specific place, the fear that trafficking can happen to *anyone* overlooks the things that make some people more vulnerable than others—such as poverty, homelessness, and other hardship.

More and more people may be vulnerable to exploitation as the cost of living rises and more people struggle to make ends meet, so our responses need to recognize and address these underlying factors if we’re serious about preventing trafficking.

So, what’s the problem?

*“So what? Isn’t **any** awareness of human trafficking a good thing?”*

This is a common question people ask.

Awareness is good, but what really helps is making sure we also understand the issue in a more complete way.

We need a deeper understanding to make a real difference—to meet victim and survivor needs and reduce risk. When we look for trafficking everywhere and believe everyone is at risk, there is less discussion about where trafficking is actually happening, what makes people more vulnerable to it, and—most importantly—how best to respond.

If we don’t talk about trafficking accurately and address the root causes of vulnerability, the risk never goes away and people will continue to be harmed.

There’s a better way, and it starts with deeper understanding.

Footnotes

- 1 Bagley, S. & Atak, I. (2025). *Data collection and reporting on human trafficking in Canada*. Available at <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-dynamics/articles/10.3389/fhumd.2024.1426605/full>
- 2 Ibid.