

The Game: Living Hell in Hotel Chains

The cops, pimps and victims all call it "The Game." It's no game. Young Canadian girls are being beaten, branded, bought and sold in hotels and motels, and along highways across the GTA and Ontario.

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The victims are as young as 12, tricked into the sex trade by “Romeo” pimps who sell a dream of money, love and security.

Every day, an increasing number of teenagers and young women are being trafficked across Ontario and forced to work as prostitutes in what has become one of the fastest growing crimes in the province, a Star investigation found. Seasoned detectives and social workers estimate the number of girls being trafficked in Ontario today to be in the thousands.

On the streets, it’s known as “The Game.”

Some of the girls are beaten by pimps — whipped with coat hangers heated up on a stove, punched, choked, burnt and forced to sleep naked at the foot of the bed, like dogs.

Some are branded — often with their pimp’s street name. Earlier this year, a 21-year-old woman was held down in Toronto as a pimp carved his initials into her hand with a razor and then poured pen ink into the wound.

They are bought and sold — in 2013, police rescued a 17-year-old girl who was traded to a pimp by her own mother for a drug debt.

They are locked in hotel rooms and forced to have sex for money, sometimes up to 15 times a day, and then hand over all their cash to a pimp they are brainwashed into believing is their boyfriend.

Sexual human trafficking is the forced confinement or transportation of a person for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Contrary to popular belief, almost all of the victims in Canada are Canadian born.

The Star's investigation is based on: information from criminal trafficking cases; federal government documents detailing the problem; interviews with victims, parents, social workers and police officers from four major regions across the GTA; and an in-depth interview with an accused pimp who is behind bars awaiting trial.

Detectives say the crime is growing because trafficking is so lucrative — a pimp can earn \$280,000 a year from one sex-trade worker, according to the RCMP. The Internet has also changed The Game by taking these girls off the streets and hiding them behind closed doors. The girls are typically sold on the website Backpage.com which police say is notorious for running sex trafficking advertisements across North America.

Over the past month, the Star has interviewed six victims who were lured into The Game and trafficked throughout the GTA, moved every few days between four-star downtown hotels to cheap motels and strip clubs along Highway 401 and the QEW.

Their stories have similar traits — what lured the girls into The Game was the illusion of love and a secure future.

What made them stay was the fear of being beaten, burnt, “outed as whores” or left for dead, and sometimes threats to their families.

Some of these girls are runaways, abandoned by their parents, or foster kids lured straight out of group homes; others grew up in middle-income households and are recruited from high schools or house parties.

The six victims the Star interviewed said those buying sex were from all walks of life, including businessmen, doctors, lawyers, police officers, labourers, drug dealers, college students, teachers, judges, accountants and soldiers. Occasionally they were women.

Since 2013, Toronto Police have intervened in 359 trafficking incidents — arresting 114 pimps — where victims have told police stories of being deprived of food until they serviced a certain number of men or being forced to call their pimps “Daddy.”

“I've met girls who have been assaulted so badly they've ingested their own teeth,” Toronto Detective David Correa said.

“I’ve met girls who were forced to put sponge pads inside their private area so they don’t bleed while they work. This is barbaric and horrific.”

Just last month, police rescued a 13-year-old girl who was sold for sex in hotels across Brampton, Niagara and Toronto. Two men and a 17-year-old girl have been charged with trafficking. Toronto Police say a previous case includes a victim as young as 12.

Inspector Joanna Beaven-Desjardins, commander of the Toronto Police Sex Crimes Unit, said pimps “brand them like cattle and move them like cattle.” “This is a Toronto problem, an Ontario problem and a Canada problem. Everyone thinks it’s not happening here, but it is,” she said.



A man enters a motel room at the Mississauga Gates Inn on Dundas Street, five minutes after another man exited the same room. *Melissa Renwick/Toronto Star*

On a Thursday night in late November, the Star booked a room at the Mississauga Gates Inn — a motel nestled off Highway 427 that has been named by police and victims as a hot spot for human trafficking.

The two-floor motel, which touts \$60 rooms online, was a late-night hive of activity, with flashy cars running laps of the parking lot and men dressed in hoodies and baggy jeans killing time watching movies on iPads in high-end SUVs and Cadillacs.

Star reporters observed a young woman, likely in her late teens with a face full of makeup, walk into a room around 9:30 p.m. Shortly after, a middle-aged man, who appeared to be an airport limousine driver, pulled into the car park and scanned the motel as he took off his suit jacket, neatly folded it and laid it down on his back seat.

He then walked to the woman's door, knocked and was quickly let inside. Exactly half an hour later the man left, looking towards the ground as he walked the dimly lit motel corridor.

Ten minutes later another man arrived at her door.

A cleaner moved in and out of the rooms, changing sheets until the early hours of the morning.

<http://projects.thestar.com/human-sex-trafficking-ontario-canada/>