



Public Safety
Canada

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Human Trafficking Public Awareness Study

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared for Public Safety Canada

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Executive summary

1. Background and objectives

Following the Government of Canada's 2019 budget announcement and formal evaluation of Canada's National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (HT), the federal government introduced a new *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* that sets out a comprehensive way forward to address this complex issue. The strategy brought together all federal efforts aimed at addressing human trafficking in Canada (and abroad) under one plan, framing all federal activities under the internationally recognized pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnerships, and adding a new pillar of "empowerment" to ensure a more victim-centered approach. In-depth consultations conducted by Public Safety Canada identified the vital need for increased public awareness and knowledge, to help communities and stakeholders better recognize the early signs of human trafficking, reduce the stigmatization of victims, and improve proactive response to incidents.

As a first step in addressing public awareness needs, Public Safety's marketing team contracted Envionics to conduct an online survey of Canadians in 2020. The purpose of this survey was to establish a quantitative baseline of the current state of public opinion on the issue of human trafficking, and provide the data required to conduct an analysis of the knowledge attitudes and behaviours of the Canadian public. The goal is to identify target audience segments (primary and secondary) for a future marketing campaign on human trafficking. This initial baseline data collection has been followed up with a tracking survey using a similar methodology, which is the subject of this report.

Research objectives include the following:

- the tracking and evaluation of current HT campaign performance in accordance with the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada
- gathering behavioural insights from Indigenous audiences on current knowledge levels, attitudes and opinions related to HT.

The results will provide the Department with data to evaluate the current HT campaign strategy and to inform marketing product development for Indigenous audiences.

2. Methodology

Envionics Research conducted quantitative and qualitative research phases in support of this study; the qualitative research is reported separately.

Envionics conducted an online survey of 2,184 Canadians, 16 years of age and older. The surveys were completed from October 20 to November 13, 2023. The 2,184 respondents include members of the general public, plus oversampled subgroups of interest. In total (those identified in the general population plus the oversamples), the survey covered 836 parents of children aged 13 to 19; 313 youth ages 16 to 19; 323 young adults aged 20 to 25; and 244 Indigenous parents and youth. This size of sample provides robust data to understand behaviours, opinions, and attitudes within the total population and subgroups of interest. Envionics set quotas by age, gender, and region, and the data have been weighted to ensure the sample is representative of these populations according to the most recently available Census information.

Note that, in this report, “racialized persons” refers to those respondents Chinese, Filipino, Other East or Southeast Asian, South Asian, African/Black, Latin American, Arab, or West Asian.

The survey achieved the following distributions (please note there is overlap in the categories; youth includes Indigenous youth; parents include indigenous parents etc.):

General public survey plus oversamples		
Target group	Actual Unweighted	Actual Weighted*
Adults 26 and over	1,548	1,771
Youth and young adults	636	413
Youth/young adult age breakdown		
16-19 years old	313	177
20-25 years old	323	236
Adults 26 and over breakdown		
Parents of children aged 13-19 years old	836	784
Non-parents	712	987
Indigenous Canadians including youth	244	109
Non-Indigenous Canadians including youth	1,940	2,075
Total respondents	2,184	2,184
Atlantic Canada	163	159
Quebec	510	515
Ontario	825	835
Prairies	374	370
BC	293	294
Territories	19	11

*Results are weighted by gender and age to 2021 Census data.

As an online panel survey is a non-probability sample, no margin of sampling error is reported. More information about the methodology for this survey is included in Appendix A.

3. Cost of research

The cost of this research was \$262,397.30 (HST included), including a qualitative research phase that is published under separate cover.

4. Use of findings of research

Results from the quantitative tracking survey tests will help evaluate the effectiveness of the current marketing and advertising campaign. The POR research will enable the Department to obtain tracking measurement of Canadians’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours with respect to HT in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the

campaign strategy. Results from the qualitative exploratory focus groups will inform campaign messaging and help shape specific resources and tactics developed specifically for Indigenous audiences.

5. Key findings

In this wave of the research, Canadians as a whole continue to take human trafficking seriously, and young Canadians show some evidence of reduced complacency about the potential risk. Close to half of young people are now at least somewhat concerned that they themselves could become a victim of human trafficking, up from one-third in 2020. However, it is still thought to largely be a “big city” problem, and awareness of specific resources remains generally low. The key findings of this research can be summarized as follows:

Safety and human trafficking in context/general awareness

- Approximately eight in ten Canadians think each of the presented list of eight safety issues impacting younger people is at least somewhat serious. As in 2020, they are most likely to say child sexual exploitation/harassment online is extremely serious, followed by human trafficking, guns and gangs, cyberbullying, and illegal drug use. Slightly over half say this about hate crimes. As in 2020, fewer indicate gender-based violence and climate change as extremely impacting youth.
- Ranking the same list to determine the most serious issue, most likely to be rated as number 1 (with each being as rated #1 by one in five) are child sexual exploitation/harassment online and cyberbullying. Around one in seven selected illegal drug use as the top threat, and around one in ten each think this of guns and gangs, climate change, or human trafficking. Canadians remain least likely to rate gender-based violence or hate crimes as a top safety threat for younger Canadians.
- Two-thirds of Canadians think they understand the issue of human trafficking at least somewhat well, and eight in ten believe they know what the term “grooming” means.
- Canadians most commonly define human trafficking as people being forced into the sex trade, or as the more general trading of humans. Around two in ten each say it is considered grooming to have people perform illegal acts against their will, or the general exploitation of people.
- Strong majorities of Canadians consider the following to be human trafficking examples: someone being pressured into the sex trade, someone being smuggled across borders to be exploited, someone being forced to work against their will, or having a person’s organs harvested. Half incorrectly believe that someone being willingly smuggled across borders is considered human trafficking.
- As in 2020, a strong majority of Canadians (eight in ten) continue to agree that human trafficking is a growing problem in Canada. Majorities *disagree* that youth in Canada are generally safe online from human trafficking (three-quarters), that human trafficking mostly happens in other countries (six in ten), and that forced labour crimes are very rare in Canada (just under six in ten). However, somewhat fewer than in 2020 agree that they would be taken very seriously by authorities if they reported a case of human trafficking (seven in ten, down from three-quarters in 2020).

Perceptions of risk and prevalence

- Eight in ten Canadians say human trafficking is a somewhat serious problem, with one-third thinking it is extremely serious and two-thirds that feel human trafficking is becoming more of a problem in Canada than in the past. When asked to consider the impact of human trafficking closer to home, just over four

in ten Canadians do not believe it is a serious problem in their local community; this has, however, declined seven percentage points since 2020.

- Most continue to feel fewer than half of children, youth, and young adults are at serious risk of being victims of human trafficking. Just over four in ten Canadians say that 20 percent or less of children, youth, and young adults are at serious risk; while another three in ten think a significant 20 to 40 percent of these groups are at risk.
- Six in ten Canadian parents of children age up to 19 years are now at least somewhat concerned that one of their own children could be a victim of human trafficking (up seven percentage points from 2020) with one-quarter being very concerned.
- Just over six in ten Canadians believe human trafficking of young people either happens occasionally and affects a minority of young people, or that it is quite rare (modestly down from 2020). Just under four in ten now think that human trafficking is either pretty common and affects a lot of young people or is everywhere and impacts almost all.
- Canadians continue to identify runaway youth, young women and girls, and low-income youth as the most likely potential victims of human trafficking. Other groups considered at risk include youth with mental health issues and Indigenous youth.
- The most likely human trafficking perpetrators are generally thought to be organized criminals or strangers, including anonymous people online. Canadians remain notably less inclined to identify people who would be known to the victims, such as current or former intimate partners.
- Of a provided list of options, Canadians remain most likely to think human trafficking is a “big city” crime (over seven in ten). Just over one-third believe it is likely taking place in towns along the U.S. border, one-third think it occurs mainly in coastal communities, and one in three think it is happening in rural areas.
- Consistent with Canadians perceiving human trafficking as a “big city” problem, they are most likely to indicate it happens in more populous provinces, namely Ontario, British Columbia and, to a far lesser extent, Quebec.
- Canadians continue to associate human trafficking with such businesses or sectors as massage parlors, domestic service, and hospitality.

Perceptions of Safety and Recognition of Warning Signs

- The vast majority of youth (eight in ten or more) feel somewhat or very safe at home, work, school, or when walking in their own neighbourhood. As in 2020, notable proportions only feel somewhat safe—opposed to very safe—and youth are less likely in 2023 to feel *very* safe in all of these locations.
- Unchanged from 2020, eight in ten young people would be at least somewhat comfortable talking with their parents or another older adult about sensitive or personal safety issues; four in ten are very comfortable with this.

- Just under nine in ten Canadian youth would usually or always inform a friend or family member if they were going to meet someone in person who they'd met online; over half would always do this.
- Close to half of young people are somewhat concerned that they themselves could be a victim of human trafficking (up from one-third in 2020), while just over half are not very or not at all concerned, with two in ten (down from one-third from 2022) being completely unconcerned.
- Of seven listed possible warning signs of human trafficking, Canadians remain most likely to be suspicious if someone did not have control over important documents, had excess cash, had more than one cell phone, or if someone is deceived about the nature of their job, its location or employer.

Awareness of human trafficking ad campaigns, organizations and how to respond

- Under one in ten Canadians are able to name any organization in Canada that they feel is engaged in addressing and raising awareness of human trafficking; over nine in ten cannot name any.
- One-quarter of Canadians recall having heard or seen an advertisement or public service announcement about human trafficking in the past year (down from three in ten in 2020); three-quarters do not recall having seen anything. Those who recalled having seen something mainly have vague recollections of who sponsored the communication they saw.
- Nine in ten Canadians are not aware of any help lines or websites specifically to support people facing the prospect of being pressured into human trafficking. Among the one in ten who provided a response, Canadians would most likely turn to calling 911 or the police.
- In the event they became suspicious that a human trafficking crime was happening around them, the most likely action, by far, would be to contact the local police. Three in ten would contact the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline (a new option in 2023), and a similar number would talk to a friend or trusted family member.
- When prompted, ten percent of Canadians are aware of the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline that provides support to victims, provides general information on human trafficking, and helps facilitate the reporting of incidences of human trafficking—up four percentage points from 2020.
- Canadians were presented with a new question and brief description of Bill S-211. When asked if they have heard anything about the new labour supply chain legislation, one in ten say they have. When asked how important it is that businesses take measures to reduce the risk of forced or child labour in their global supply chains, almost all say this is at least somewhat important; over two-thirds say it is very important.

Political neutrality certification

Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify as senior officer of Environics that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada, and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

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