

# Sexual Exploitation Prevention Education for Indigenous Girls

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## Abstract

Indigenous girls in Western Canada comprise over half of the victims of sexual exploitation, but the gravity of this phenomenon is overlooked in education and academia. Five Indigenous sexual exploitation survivors and 19 service providers in a western Canadian city were interviewed to critically examine the life experiences that establish pathways to exploitation, methods of recruitment, and prevention education recommendations to inform school-based interventions. Based on these interviews, nine pathways to sexual exploitation for Indigenous girls were uncovered, most notably sexual abuse, transition from reserves, and the prison system. This article summarizes a study conducted from 2014–2016 (Louie, 2016), which found that an extensive range of gender, age, race, and class backgrounds in Canadian society contribute to Indigenous girls being recruited into sexual exploitation. At present, most research and education programs emphasize intervention, missing a key opportunity to prevent recruitment into sexual exploitation. This

study has generated a potential framework for schools to establish prevention education for Indigenous girls experiencing an increased threat of sexual exploitation.

*Keywords:* sexual exploitation, Indigenous education, decolonizing education

## Résumé

Au Canada, plus de la moitié des victimes d'exploitation sexuelle sont des filles autochtones de l'Ouest canadien, mais l'ampleur de ce phénomène demeure méconnue dans le milieu de l'éducation et de l'enseignement. Cinq survivantes de l'exploitation sexuelle autochtones et dix-neuf intervenants sociaux d'une ville de l'Ouest canadien sont interviewés pour examiner de façon critique les expériences de vie qui creusent les trajectoires vers l'exploitation, les méthodes de recrutement, et pour émettre des recommandations d'éducation à la prévention pour les intervenants scolaires. Sur la base de ces entrevues, neuf trajectoires vers l'exploitation sexuelle des filles autochtones sont dévoilées, notamment l'abus sexuel, le départ de la réserve, et le système carcéral. Cet article résume une étude conduite entre 2014 et 2016 (Louie, 2016) qui a démontré qu'au sein de la société canadienne, un large éventail d'individus de différents genres, âges, races et classes sociales contribuent à ce que des filles autochtones soient recrutées pour l'exploitation sexuelle. Présentement, la plupart des recherches et des programmes d'éducation mettent l'emphase sur l'intervention et passent à côté d'une opportunité clé de prévention du recrutement pour l'exploitation sexuelle. Cette étude propose une ligne directrice potentielle pour les écoles afin d'établir une éducation à la prévention pour prêter assistance aux filles autochtones à haut risque de sombrer dans l'exploitation sexuelle.

*Mots-clés :* exploitation sexuelle, éducation des autochtones, éducation interculturelle

## Introduction

Indigenous girls are drastically overrepresented in sexual exploitation. They comprise between 50 and 90% of the cases in western Canadian cities, despite representing from 2 to 5% of the population in these regions (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; Native Women's Association of Canada [NWAC], 2014; Seshia, 2005; Sethi, 2007). Canadian school systems, due to the fallout of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) era, are directly implicated in creating an environment of overwhelming oppression for Indigenous peoples. Unparalleled overrepresentation in sexual exploitation, initiated by intergenerational trauma, is only one component in a confluence of negative experiences for Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015).

The marginalization of sexually exploited Indigenous girls has been accentuated by a lack of institutional response and a pervasive victim-blaming mentality in the national consciousness (Sethi, 2007). In an attempt to challenge the existing perspective, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC, 2014) argued, "Perhaps it is time to reframe the discussion of sex trafficking in Canada and greatly increase the emphasis on exploring Aboriginal overrepresentation" (p. 42). Supporting the NWAC's imperative, researchers have found that sexually exploited Indigenous girls are more likely to experience physical abuse and rape than their non-Indigenous counterparts, while also being less likely to have their reports pursued by the police (Christensen & Cler-Cunningham, 2001). Moreover, Bingham, Leo, Zhang, Montaner, and Shannon (2014) argued that "little or no research has specifically investigated Aboriginal women's pathways to sex-work involvement" (p. 443). The limited research available is in stark contrast to the seriousness of this issue, while also plainly revealing the absence of school-based approaches.

Findings from research I conducted from 2014 to 2016 (Louie, 2016), as a part of a larger study, highlight the schools' lack of attention to the issue of the overrepresentation of sexually exploited Indigenous girls. This issue demands the development of school-based curricula that support resiliency and prevention of entry into sexual exploitation. Based on my findings, I have endeavoured to fill the gap by developing the foundations of school-based approaches for prevention education. Prior to presenting these potential prevention measures, it is critical to understand the difference between sexual exploitation of minors and sex work undertaken by consenting adults:

[The] act of coercing, luring or engaging a child, under the age of 18, into a sexual act, and involvement in the sex trade or pornography, with or without the child's consent in exchange for money, drugs, shelter, food, protection or other necessities. (Seshia, 2005, p. 6)

In my study I address the deficiency of academic research and school-based prevention as a means of building resistance to the oppressive forces of exploitation. I posed three key questions: Which life experiences create pathways to the sexual exploitation for Indigenous girls? How are Indigenous girls entering or becoming recruited into sexual exploitation? And, what should prevention education look like? To answer these questions, I conducted case study research in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, with five Indigenous sexual exploitation survivors and 19 social service providers.

In this article I begin by describing the linear and cyclical nature of intergenerational trauma borne out of IRS for Canadian Indigenous populations. The fallout from generations of traumatic experiences is directly connected to pathways to sexual exploitation. Pathways, in this research, refer to the life experiences that both predict and create an increased threat of sexual exploitation for Indigenous girls. The methodology I adopted was based on Smith's (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies*, in which she stressed the need for research with Indigenous communities that models and promotes self-determination. To establish knowledge-based educational recommendations, I analyzed the research findings to inform educators of the imperative elements of prevention curriculum. I discuss the implications for schools and the implementation of prevention programs to position this research within educational discourses. My primary aim in this study was to establish evidence-based curriculum recommendations for prevention education grounded in the knowledge of Indigenous women who have experienced sexual exploitation.

A critical limitation of sexual exploitation prevention research is the onus placed on the victim. This research is based upon an acknowledgement of oppressive and predatory practices targeting Indigenous girls, practices which are a problematic reality of Western society. These practices require children to endure multiple pathways to transcend their environment, instead of holding predators and our collective societal inaction accountable. Further research studies are needed to formulate educational strategies to prevent boys and men from acting out learned predatory behaviour. Moreover, since I found that predators come from diverse backgrounds of age, race, gender, and

relationship with the victim (Louie, 2016), targeting prevention toward predators, although vital, would require a far more robust approach that would include all Canadians. Researchers have the potential in subsequent studies to increase protection for Indigenous girls by developing education programs for potential predators. In the interim, prevention programming offers the potential for creating community resiliency while comprehensive prevention could target potential predators across the spectrum of Canadians. In addition, Canadian systems, which have perpetrated violence against Indigenous girls, require deconstruction to remove the colonial foundations perpetuating the marginalization of this population. Systemic change is critical, but it is outside the parameters of this study. Until systemic victimization is abolished, it is imperative to conduct research that will provide insight into transformative resistance through education.

## **Linear and Cyclical Progressions of Trauma**

The contemporary social positioning of the Indigenous peoples is impossible to convey without first examining the derailment of culture and language via forced assimilative practices. Post-Indian Act Canada saw an era of tragic attempts of cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples through assimilation. A primary component of the assimilative approach was the IRS system, which was designed to both usher Indigenous peoples into Western society and eliminate their communal strength (TRC, 2015). The dependent and authoritative relationship created by the Indian Act dramatically shifted the bond between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, while establishing harmful education systems that would irrevocably damage generations of Indigenous people.

The IRS system, which remained in Canada until 1996, forcibly apprehended Indigenous children from their families and placed them in distant boarding schools (TRC, 2015). As a means of establishing the linear trajectory of trauma, forcible apprehension from community and widespread abusive treatment at the hands of priests, nuns, and teachers in IRS modelled negative parental practices, which were then inflicted upon subsequent generations (TRC, 2015). Maladaptive parental practices that grew out of the IRS era are the genesis of trauma in modern Indigenous communities. The trauma has manifested as an increased threat of losing children to the welfare system, shaming, violence (Gough, Trocmé, Brown, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2005), poverty, low academic

achievement (MacDonald & Wilson, 2013), food insecurity, suicide, and sexual abuse (Fontaine, 2005), all of which Indigenous peoples experience at higher rates than any other demographic in Canada. The traumatic cycles of abuse and neglect pervasive in IRS led to Indigenous girls being susceptible to the pathways to sexual exploitation, which I clearly trace and describe in this article.

Indigenous families pulled apart by residential schools lost their connections to traditional education and parenting strategies. Morrissette (1994) contended that instead of learned behaviour based on their family's culture, Indigenous youth modelled their behaviour on "the dysfunctional relationships of the school" (p. 384). In addition to the widespread dynamics of abuse, maternal and paternal care in IRS was often characterized by cold and authoritarian relationships. Evidence of this phenomenon is apparent in research by Ing (2000), who found that second- and third-generation survivors adopted and re-enacted the negative elements of IRS in their parenting.

The Canadian federal school system's attacks on Indigenous families through IRS challenged the configuration and quality of interaction of Indigenous parenting. For example, single-parent Indigenous families are more common and have a greater risk of poverty than non-Indigenous single-parent families (Statistics Canada, 2006). One devastating result of this family crisis is children lost to the welfare system. Statistics Canada (2016b) reported that 48% of the 76,000 children in out-of-home care were Indigenous, despite comprising less than 7% of the youth population. In their research study on the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in foster care, Gough et al. (2005) found that although Indigenous youth are apprehended for physical and sexual abuse at a frequency comparable to non-Indigenous families, Indigenous families lose children at unprecedented rates due to poverty, unsafe housing, and other monetary reasons. In essence, the impoverished conditions that are a hallmark of colonization are used as the justification for once again dissolving Indigenous families.

Locating the origins of pathways to sexual exploitation in IRS means identifying colonization as a primary factor. The implications of colonization need not be limited to historical institutions; instead, it is important to unpack the contemporary manifestations of colonial frameworks in schools, healthcare, and the justice system. Although outside of the direct purview of this research, decolonizing institutions in Canada is imperative for sustainable healing, development, and self-determination. Success in sexual exploitation education will be limited if colonial structures and mentalities, conscious or unconscious,

remain dominant. Fundamentally, colonization flourishes due to a persistent assumption of white supremacy, which must be challenged in schools for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike if individuals and systems are to be decolonized (Poitras Pratt, Louie, Hanson, & Ottmann, 2018).

For Indigenous women, oppression has manifested as and has become tangled with issues such as misogyny, white supremacy, feminism, and patriarchy, all of which occur under the towering shadow of colonization. The impact of misogyny has fallen heavily on their shoulders, perhaps due to their positioning at the crossroads of racist and sexist traditions of colonial hegemony. In traditional Indigenous communities, women held prominent political and social positions that were not limited by their gender (TRC, 2015), in stark contrast to most Western nations, historically. The challenge to communal traditions, structures, and rites in IRS negatively impacted the role of women in Indigenous communities. Indigenous women have been marginalized in the feminist movement by middle-class white women while their interests have been appropriated by men monopolizing leadership of Indigenous movements (St. Denis, 2013). Some Indigenous scholars (Monture-Angus, 1995) have contended that accepting a place in feminism means relinquishing the valued position women traditionally held in Indigenous communities. Patriarchy, in their perspective, is a fundamental aspect of colonization, which cannot be addressed for Indigenous women through feminist principles alone. Moreover, Indigenous traditions, in some instances, have been reimaged in the likeness of patriarchal mechanisms, all the while being shrouded under the distorted cloak of “authenticity.”

As a result of their shifting status, Indigenous women experience domestic violence, physical abuse, and murder at more than four times the rate of non-Indigenous women in Canada (Brownridge, 2008). Gilchrist (2010) argued that despite such significant overrepresentation, Indigenous women as victims of violence are overlooked by media due to a “devaluation of Aboriginal womanhood” (p. 373). Overwhelming physical and structural gender-based oppression of Indigenous women is clearly informed by the evolution of the IRS era into the ongoing colonial mentality of societal institutions. In response to the focus on the plight of Indigenous women, I now consider how these experiences are related to the current cause and response to overrepresentation in sexual exploitation.

Within the limited field of academic research investigating Canadian Indigenous girls experiencing sexual exploitation, most researchers have relied on Seshia’s (2005)

study on street exploitation of women in Winnipeg, and on Kingsley and Mark's (2000) study on the exploitation of Indigenous children and youth across Canada. Kingsley and Mark did not focus on education, instead developing wider policy-related findings that called for national roundtables, youth-driven projects, and a national campaign. Despite Seshia's (2005) Winnipeg study not being Indigenous-specific, the percentage of Indigenous women working in the visible sex trade in this region is as high as 90 percent, despite them comprising five percent of the populace (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; Seshia, 2005). These researchers have offered a wealth of information regarding sexual exploitation, but they did not reference the role schools could play or address the creation of prevention programs, emphasizing the need for this research.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly every author who has published an article on related issues of sexually exploited Indigenous girls has called for additional research into pathways and recruitment (Abbotsford Youth Commission, 2010; Bingham et al., 2014; NWAC, 2014). Sexual exploitation researchers and authors of sex trade literature have been primarily focused on activity or intervention (Seshia, 2005; Sethi, 2007), which are invaluable sources for understanding the nuances of the industry, but do not address preventive aspects of school-based education and research, which I cover in this article.

I designed a conceptual framework model to present the cycle of abuse within the Indigenous community, highlighting the possibilities for prevention, intervention, and suppression (see Figure 1). I based its design on the literature review that unearthed the lived experiences of Indigenous girls who were sexually exploited (Seshi, 2005; Sethi, 2007) as a means of establishing where prevention and intervention could occur. Cyclical experiences result in children being exposed to the same pathways as their parents, thereby influencing the children to reenact intergenerational trauma. Although all children who endure pathways are not destined for recruitment into exploitation, the pathways are also

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1 Seshia's (2005) study on street sexual exploitation in Winnipeg highlighted the common factors leading to exploitation: poverty, colonialism, multiple care homes, abuse, substance dependency, sexism, peer pressure, generational sexual exploitation, and low self-esteem. Kingsley and Mark (2000) investigated sexual exploitation of Indigenous youth and found that Indigenous girls are susceptible to the following pathways: systemic fragmentation of culture; fragmentation of families; poverty; physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; substance abuse; racism; gender issues; and self-esteem (p. 12). The NWAC's (2014) general recommendations for educational programming include awareness workshops for staff, healthy relationship classes, awareness of latest research, increased funding for exploitation initiatives, and active engagement. Overall, these researchers have called for the development of new educational programming, which I have created through this research study.



predictors of other negative life outcomes, which ensure children remain within the cycle of trauma. Consequently, I contend that school-based prevention education could interrupt cyclical progressions of trauma for Indigenous girls who have experienced multiple pathways before they are sexually exploited.

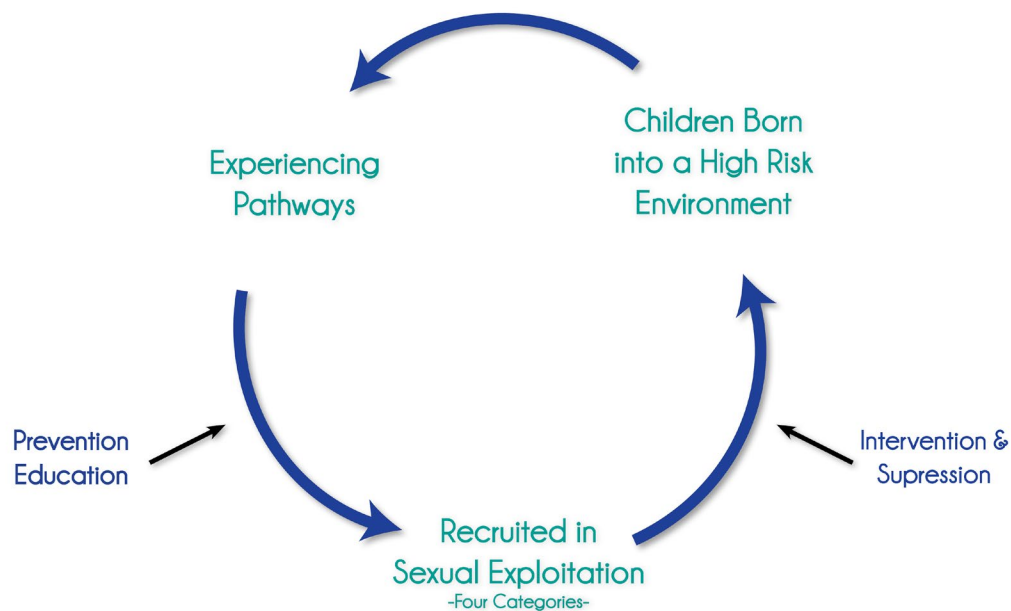


Figure 1. Cycle of sexual exploitation

## Methods

The methods I used for this study are rooted in unstructured in-depth interviews and life histories. The primary knowledge carriers in this research were five Indigenous women who have been sexually exploited and 19 service providers working with at-risk Indigenous youth. The five Indigenous survivors were all over 18 years of age (participant age was not collected) and resided in the Prince Albert area. The 19 service providers had a strong diversity of racial backgrounds, age, gender, and position within the partner organization, Prince Albert Outreach (PAO). PAO has been repeatedly recognized for

its remarkable programming (Totten & Dunn, 2011); it offers education and a familial environment for Indigenous students who have been discarded by the mainstream education system. Prince Albert was a logical location for this research due to PAO's extensive knowledge base. Moreover, Indigenous girls comprise nearly the entire population of sexually exploited youth and sex trade participants in the city, despite constituting only 17% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2006). I followed three steps to collect data for this research: document analysis, staff interviews, and interviews with survivors of sexual exploitation.

I articulate this research through a decolonizing theoretical framework. Smith's (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies* gave a voice to silenced Indigenous communities that have historically been marginalized within the academy and forced to position themselves within the mindset of their colonizers to gain recognition and validation. Smith contended that research is inherently a political act, and it has been practised and reinforced by privileged Western culture by modelling the principles of colonization. Reimagining research as a disruptive act that privileges Indigenous ways of knowing challenges unequal positioning while promoting systemic shifts in the fields of research and education.

An initial barrier I encountered in this study was the potential discomfort of a male Indigenous researcher interviewing Indigenous women on subjects that might trigger a trauma response. As an Indigenous man, I was cognizant of the potential effect my presence could have on Indigenous women disclosing traumatic life experiences given that participants had assuredly endured trauma at the hands of men. I agree with Smith (1999), who argued for research methods that emphasize empowerment at each stage. Therefore, women with counselling experience assumed the primary role of interviewing survivors. In no instance in this research did a man conduct or attend interviews with survivors of sexual exploitation.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Moreover, my positioning as an Indigenous man researching, analyzing, and making recommendations on this topic required me to be cognizant of intersectionality. Being Indigenous does not grant me the right to speak on behalf of Indigenous women. However, I designed this research to document and elevate the voices of Indigenous women who have experienced sexual exploitation so that schools can honour their voices in the curriculum design.

## Findings and Analysis

In the analysis, I summarized the interviews using the qualitative software Nvivo to locate themes and categories. I present the findings in three sections, organized by the three questions framing this research. I first explore the pathways or life experiences fostering an increased threat of sexual exploitation. Each pathway creates an increased threat in multiple ways. One pathway, sexual abuse, includes a comprehensive description of the subpathways. In addition, I provide possible responses in school-based prevention education based on the principles of prevention in the interviews, working in concert with Smith's (1999) Indigenous Research Agenda (IRA) and Ermine's (1995) Aboriginal Epistemology. The remaining pathways are briefly examined, understanding that in the larger research study (Louie, 2016), I give each section a comprehensive response, analysis, and school-based educational recommendations.<sup>3</sup>

### **Question 1: Which Life Experiences Create an Increased Threat of Sexual Exploitation for Indigenous Girls?**

The pathways I located in this research have inspired a framework for life experiences that contribute to and predict an increased threat of sexual exploitation for Indigenous girls. The models developed in this study provide a unique opportunity for practitioners to apply evidence-based research to the design of school-based prevention education. Figure 2 depicts a Venn diagram of pathways predicted in related literature, recognized by staff and reported by survivors.

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3 I have separated the responses of survivors and staff. Survivors were the Indigenous women who have experienced sexual exploitation as youth. Staff members worked for PAO in a range of capacities: teacher, school administrator, Elder, case worker, psychologist, and others.

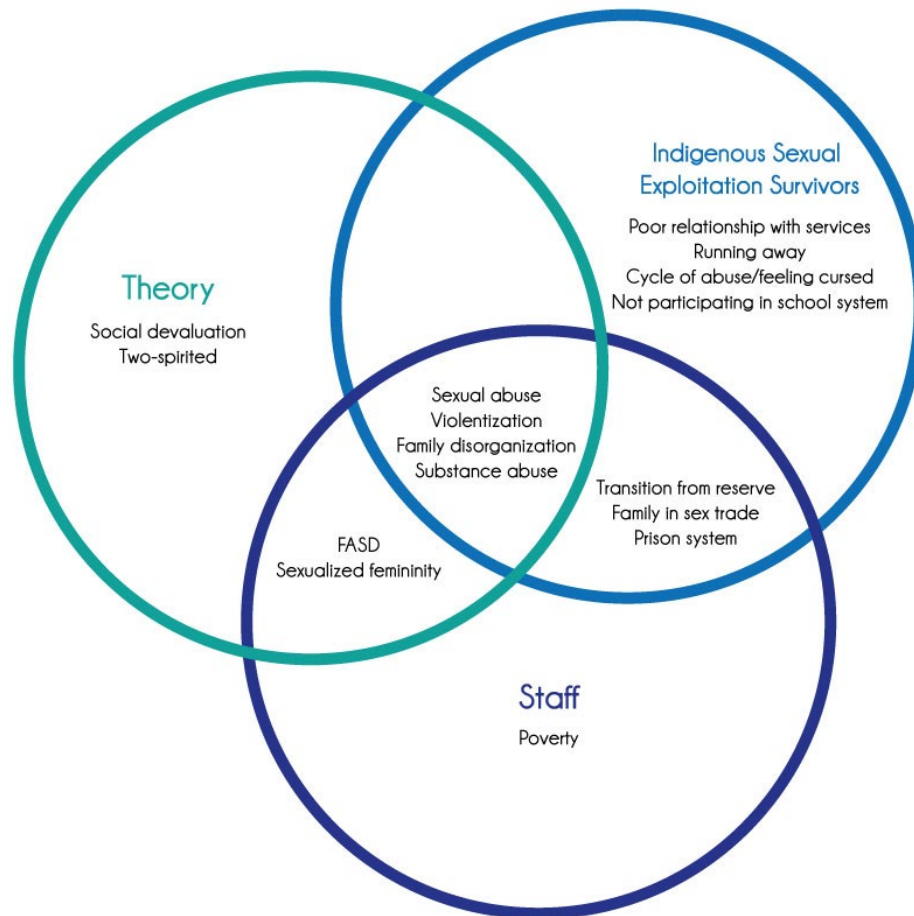


Figure 2. Pathways Venn diagram

In the final model I intentionally included each pathway identified by survivors, in order to honour their voices. However, instead of giving each mention a single designation, I amalgamated several into larger pathways.<sup>4</sup> The increased threat to Two-Spirited youth was not mentioned in any of the interviews, even though some researchers have emphasized the susceptibility of the LGBTQ population to homelessness and exploitation (Abbotsford Youth Commission, 2010). Further research studies are needed in which

<sup>4</sup> Running away was a recurring pathway that was subsumed into multiple categories due to the varied influences associated with this phenomenon. Most pathways recognized by staff were included in the final model; however, there were a few exceptions. Sexualized femininity was fused with sexual abuse, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) was removed due to infrequent references in the interviews. I removed several pathways included in the preliminary model due to their absence in the interviews.

interviewers can maintain unstructured interviews while empowering survivors to speak to Two-Spirited overrepresentation in sexual exploitation.

The pathways I have uncovered in this research could support educators in identifying Indigenous girls who have endured life experiences that predispose them to sexual exploitation. Moreover, these pathways also reveal the fundamental traumas that require school-based educational and psychological interventions. Based on the interviews with survivors and staff, the life experiences that predict an increased threat to sexual exploitation are as follows: sexual abuse, transition from reserves, prison systems, violentization, substance abuse, family disorganization, family in the sex trade, poverty, and poor relationship with services. Each pathway contains multiple subpathways that cause an increased exposure to and threat of sexual exploitation, as referenced in Figure 3.

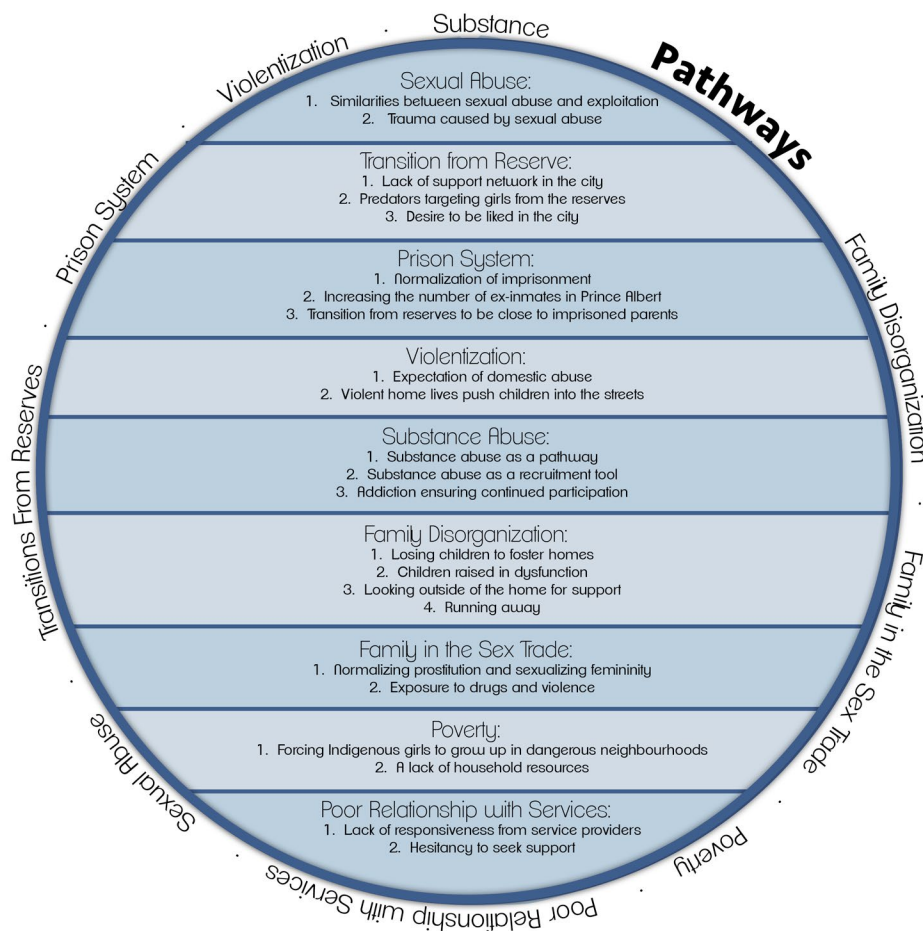


Figure 3. Pathways to sexual exploitation

The most prescient pathway that emerged during the data collection was sexual abuse, with every survivor reporting prolonged experiences with this form of trauma. Staff members affirmed that nearly every woman receiving services in response to sexual exploitation and the sex trade had a history of sexual abuse (Louie, 2016). Given that sexual abuse has been identified as the root of pathways to exploitation, prevention education needs to respond to the girls already subjected to sexual abuse, while also working to prevent children from experiencing it in the first place.

The first subpathway created by sexual abuse uncovered in this study was the perception of sexual exploitation as an extension of the abuse survivors endured as children. One survivor shared,

I think it started way before that with sexual abuse, as a kid. They would piece you off with candy or, you know, money. Back then a dollar went a long way, you know, and my brothers and sisters were hungry and that's what I used the money for. (Survivor, as cited in Louie, 2016, pp. 217–218)

Survivors frequently referenced the seamless transition between sexual abuse and exploitation; the similarity of experience created an extreme threat of recruitment: “That somehow that abuse would continue on for me. Like I said, it started way before I stood on corners, the abuse started a long time before” (survivor, as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 165). The expectation of abuse in childhood establishes similar assumptions for Indigenous girls as they mature. The normalization of sexual abuse at such a young age encourages the commodification of sexual activity. The sexualization of Indigenous femininity has been continually reinforced, and translates into a perceived loss of control of their bodies when forced into sexually exploitative activities. In many cases survivors did not recognize that their “boyfriends” were exploiting them, because these activities were being normalized when they were children.

Applying Smith's (1999) IRA to school-based prevention education has the potential to target girls who perceive their entry into sexual exploitation as an extension of sexual abuse. A survivor who participated in this research, who was sold for sex at parties as a child, could have been supported through the principles of IRA in a prevention program. The survivor was programmed at an early age to connect her sexuality with survival. “Sexual abuse. I learned how to use myself” (survivor, as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 218). Prevention education could support Indigenous girls' transformation from

perceiving their bodies as a means of survival, to embodying the stages of recovery, development, and self-determination. Indigenous women's self-affirmation by reclaiming power over their bodies speaks to Ermine's (1995) first orientation, which posits that personal transformation is an essential concept of Aboriginal epistemologies. Indigenous girls participating in prevention education could work with strong Indigenous women to view themselves as more than sexual objects and begin to develop positive self-images and communal self-esteem. Cultural education taught by Elders could instil traditional Indigenous gender identities in the lives of girls (Kenny, Fairies, Fiske, & Voyageur, 2004) whose perspectives on sexuality have been skewed by colonization, intergenerational trauma, sexualized femininity, and predatory street life.

The second subpathway created by sexual abuse was the ongoing emotional and psychological impacts of traumatic experiences. A survivor recalled being sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend when she was nine years old. After months of unrelenting abuse, she worked up the courage to tell her mother, only to be beaten and accused of fabricating the story. Several weeks later a friend was accidentally informed of the abuse, which led to the boyfriend's arrest. The nine-year-old victim was then referred to as a "bitch, whore, and slut" (survivor, as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 219) by her mother and forced to stay in a separate motel room from the rest of the family. As a result, the victim attempted suicide prior to her 10th birthday, mimicking an overdose she had seen in a movie. The abuser later committed suicide in prison, leading the mother to once again blame the victim and further isolate her from the rest of the family. This experience exemplifies the external and internalized blame that can emerge from sexual abuse (Zwi et al., 2007). Victims often shoulder the blame for these acts. Moreover, victims are sometimes burdened with further guilt when the perpetrator is imprisoned and families are disbanded by the child welfare system (Zwi et al., 2007).

A possible educational response to external and internalized blame is for reserve communities to adopt programs such as Hollow Water First Nation's Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH). Couture, Parker, Couture, Laboucane, and Native Counselling Services of Alberta (2001) found that the CHCH addressed sexual violence by using the Ojibwe Seven Sacred Teachings with offenders, victims, and families. The specific

aspects of the CHCH that could inform this research are the 13 Steps used to respond to specific sexual abuse allegations.<sup>5</sup>

Psychological professionals could use the CHCH as a framework to work with victims and victimizers, adhering to protocol to ensure that healing is paramount while communities are educated on the lifelong consequences of sexual abuse. In order to mitigate the increased threat created by sexual abuse, prevention education for Indigenous girls should be derived from the CHCH, which focuses on communal acknowledgement, psychological support, and familial healing. Hollow Water's program involves both the victim's and the victimizer's families in healing ceremonies, which was also a pedagogical recommendation made by survivors and staff in this research (Louie, 2016). First Nations communities are apprehensive about acknowledging the prevalence of sexual abuse (Herbert & McCannell, 2009), which further marginalizes victims and protects predators. Establishing the CHCH program in reserve communities supports Ermine's (1995) recommendation of an internal search for understanding, which would ask the affected parties to examine the implications of sexual abuse while empowering internal community structures to reimagine justice and reconciliation. In contrast, the fragmented nature of the traditional Western justice systems separates the victim, victimizer, and community, attending to the fallout with isolated processes.

An unexpected pathway that emerged in the analysis was the abundance of prisons in the region. The city of Prince Albert has four prisons, despite having a population of only 35,129 (Statistics Canada, 2016a). If Calgary, home to approximately 1.1 million people, were to have the same number of prisons per capita, it would have 122, but the city has just two. Staff members of PAO expressed their frustration with the preferential treatment prisons enjoy over the school system: "Maybe the government is interested more in punishment than prevention. The government chose to strengthen jails instead" (as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 146). Alexander (as cited in Karlin & Alexander, 2012) has stated that the same is true in the United States, where "poor folks of color are shuttled from decrepit, underfunded schools to brand new, high tech prisons" (para. 4). Systemic oppression has led to an overrepresentation of African American men in prison at a rate

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5 Disclosure, protecting the victim, confronting the victimizer, assisting the spouse, assisting the families/community, meeting the assessment team/RCMP/Crown, ensuring that the victimizer admits and accepts responsibility, preparation of victimizer, preparation of victim, preparation of family, organizing a special gathering, ensuring that a healing contract is implemented, and organizing a cleansing ceremony.



of 295% in the United States (Alexander, 2012). Indigenous Canadians, though a smaller segment of the population, are overrepresented in prisons by a rate of 580% (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013).

The percentage of Canadian inmates who are Indigenous and the overrepresentation of prisons in the region are increasing the threat of sexual exploitation for Indigenous girls in Prince Albert by expanding the Indigenous gang populations that are a documented threat of sexual exploitation (Sethi, 2007). The three categories of subpathways created by the overrepresentation of prisons I uncovered in this research are the normalization of incarceration, inmates with gang affiliation remaining in Prince Albert upon release, and families moving to Prince Albert from reserve communities to be near relatives in prison. In my full study report (Louie, 2016), I provide a deep analysis and prevention education responses for each subpathway.

In this section I have examined the myriad life experiences that predict a greater threat of exploitation for Indigenous girls. Prior to analyzing Question 2, it is important to ask how the pathways uncovered in this section are related to the deficits established by IRS. Public education systems, as part of their fundamental mandate, are required to attend to the basic needs of Indigenous students, while also owing a significant debt to Indigenous communities for their central role in inflicting generational trauma and stolen culture through over a century of abusive IRS education.

## **Question 2: How Are Indigenous Girls Recruited Into the Sex Trade?**

Strategies used to recruit Indigenous girls into sexual exploitation provide curriculum designers with key directives for school-based prevention education. I found in this research that Indigenous girls in Prince Albert are recruited into sexual exploitation through the following means: female recruitment, boyfriends, gangs, meeting basic needs, social media, substance abuse, family recruitment, and reserve recruitment.

Mirroring my approach in the section on pathways, I examine recruitment by naming the primary findings and giving further insight into several recruitment methods. The evident overlap between the individuals recruiting and the methods they use requires a complex approach to school-based prevention education, which I provide here. It should be noted that in my larger study I provide a comprehensive analysis of each

mechanism of recruitment, including possible school-based educational solutions (Louie, 2016).

Researchers have contended that, in order to avoid being recruited into exploitation themselves, Indigenous female gang members are required to recruit girls in their place (Abbotsford Youth Commission, 2010). PAO has noted girls recruiting at an alarming rate: “One recruited seven girls within this program” (as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 150). Despite the evidence in the available literature pointing to female recruitment occurring as a defense against their own recruitment, interviewees in this study presented a contradicting argument. Staff and survivors claimed that female recruitment was perpetuated by predatory individuals, by the threat of violence, and by offering friendship.

A survivor gave an extensive personal account of female recruitment that provides a considerable departure from the literature, mirroring the violent and abusive strategies used by male gang members and pimps:

I actually got put out by his sister... They were pretty scary people... Also, she was a scary woman... In regards to fighting her back, there was another thing, she said she knew my mom. My mom was on the street, my mom got put out when she was 11, by my father. She knew my mom and my dad. She had told me the first time...she said, “I’ll blow your fucking mom away,” and I believed her; I believed she was that crazy to do it. People were afraid of her, like adults. I’m kind of locked in this thing. (Survivor, as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 150)

This example shows that girls are not strictly passive in recruitment; occasionally they embody the predatory force. Although the recruiter may have been experiencing her own pressures or threats unbeknownst to the survivor, this instance is indicative of a pattern where girls are embodying active elements of recruitment.

A second survivor was forced to use violence to initiate an Indigenous girl into sexual exploitation through gang membership:

I had to beat up some girls. Some of them were so tiny, they would say “No, please,” but I didn’t want to. I know if I didn’t do it, I’m going to get a beating... He is going to go to the room and beat the shit out of me. I would look at them, they would look at me with these eyes saying, “Please don’t.” Before they try and

plead, I would beat the shit out of them, and that was their initiation. (Survivor, as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 176)

This example falls outside of the explanation most researchers have offered—that girls recruit to avoid being forced into sexual exploitation—because this recruiter was already active. In this instance, recruitment and initiation were undertaken by girls in order to avoid being beaten or killed by their boyfriends. A third survivor said, “Women are doing it lots [recruiting], lots of women. Actually, I see more women than men” (as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 270).

The third method of female recruitment is called “teaming up” and involves a relatively older girl befriending young recruitment targets. A staff member referenced another female recruiter, saying, “She has been on the streets since she was 14. The girl offered protection to other girls and gives them IV drugs and protecting them out there. She offers girls a place to stay, then pushes them onto the street” (as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 150). In this case, the girl did not see herself as predatory but as offering safe entry into the street life she assumed her younger recruits would inhabit eventually. Once again, recruitment was not undertaken instead of being pushed onto the street; it was happening concurrently.

The motivation of female recruiters is relevant for the creation of school-based prevention education curricula. Indigenous girls who have experienced multiple pathways must be educated on the methods employed by active recruiters. Survivors emphatically endorsed the inclusion of Indigenous women who have experienced sexual exploitation in teaching prevention education. To create resiliency against female recruitment, Indigenous women with experience in sexual exploitation could lead classes by sharing their knowledge of recruitment tactics. Furthermore, survivors could be empowered using a strengths-based model to honour their wisdom regarding resiliency and strength. In some cases, prevention education needs to be simple and straightforward: This is how they recruit, and this is what you need to do. The women’s group model PAO developed in the Warrior Spirit Walking Program (Totten & Dunne, 2011) is a best practice that could be adopted by schools to promote healthy friendships among Indigenous girls based on mutual respect. Kenny et al. (2004) stated that holistic research that honours the “past, present, and future...[using] intergenerational discourse” (p. 5) is necessary for research investigating female Indigenous participants and translates seamlessly into school-based

prevention. Survivors' contributions encourage a holistic design that honours the past and the knowledge of Indigenous women who have experienced comparable pathways, while also emphasizing the strength of Indigenous femininity.

The experiences of a survivor who was recruited by her boyfriend, a gang leader, encompassed all the known elements of recruitment by love bombing (boyfriends) (Louie, 2016). Upon being introduced to her eventual boyfriend, a much older man, she was drugged and held captive. The next morning she woke up handcuffed to his bed and severely beaten. Over the ensuing weeks the predator reversed his position and showered her with affection. Eventually, he began subtly pressuring her to participate in the sex trade: "He was giving me kind of like hinting for me to go for a walk" (survivor, as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 174). When she returned home, apologizing for not being able to go through with it, he said, "I can't stand the thought of any other man's hands on you" (p. 174), at which this young girl thought, "He really likes me" (p. 174). Eventually the boyfriend begged her to walk the streets, claiming they had no other recourse due to the physical threats in response to the debts he had amassed. Once she became involved in sexual exploitation, scarcely a teenager, her boyfriend used recurring violence, fear, and forced addiction to establish control. In the report of my larger study (Louie, 2016), I give comprehensive recommendations regarding school-based options, including programs in which Indigenous women provide an education on healthy relationship expectations and preparing for potential signs of grooming by boyfriends.

Two elements of recruitment in this research are borne from meeting basic needs: the vulnerable position that lacking necessities creates for Indigenous girls, and intentionally entering the sex trade to meet basic survival needs. Although these subpathways may seem identical, there is a demonstrable separation between the two. The former arises from experiencing homelessness or lacking transportation, which places girls in a position where they may be assaulted, while the latter is a deliberate decision based on a lack of access to housing, food, or transportation. Survivor and staff interviews contained repeated histories of Indigenous girls being preyed upon due to an absence of reliable housing, food, or transportation. In most cases, older men trolling the streets identified vulnerable children and offered somewhere to stay for the night, a hot meal, or a ride back to the reserve. The following example is a common outcome for Indigenous girls experiencing homelessness:

When I was in the Royal Wilson Centre I ran away briefly, like a couple of nights. In that time I got raped again, an old guy threw money at me. Luckily I wasn't killed, because I think that is what he was looking for, a place to kill me. He couldn't find a quiet enough place; there was still vehicles coming around. (Survivor, as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 178)

In instances like these, offering money to underage girls is a gross but common justification on the part of the rapists, an attempt to alleviate residual guilt or awareness of their heinous assault. In this case, the victim felt lucky to have avoided being murdered, a critical aspect of her response overlooked by the centre charged with her care. School-based prevention education could connect girls in on-reserve schools with applicable social service providers who could meet their shelter, transportation, and food security needs if they ever found themselves in the city in a vulnerable situation.

One of the most pernicious methods that recruiters use limits the school system's capacity to educate youth as a means of prevention. Several survivors were kidnapped from the streets and raped, stolen from schools and forced onto the streets, or sold by family members at parties (Louie, 2016). Given the lack of agency involved in kidnapping, educating students alone will not suffice to attend to these violent injustices. Extending prevention beyond children to educators, police, social workers, and parents is imperative for a holistic approach (Ermine, 1995). One of my primary education recommendations is to create a hub of services and education for the entire community and social service practitioners serving Indigenous girls' needs. Although this approach may be accurately described as community-based, I believe the design is actually a hybrid of school- and community-based approaches. Asking children to be solely responsible for the prevention of recruitment is misguided; the entire community is charged with ensuring that every child has basic protections. Family-based education was a pedagogical recommendation repeatedly voiced by survivors and staff. Extending participation outwards builds from Smith's (1999) principle of democratization as a tool for instituting a community that embraces protective responsibilities.

### **Question 3: What Should Prevention Education Look Like?**

Sexual exploitation survivors provided profound insight into potential education for youth in critical periods of recruitment. Based on the interviews in this study, prevention

education should be focused on Indigenous girls from ages seven to 13 years in on-reserve schools. A combination of teachers, survivors, female community members, Elders, role models, and service providers should teach prevention education using love, engagement, patience, availability, and understanding. Entire families should be included in every step, and should insist upon local cultural education and ways of knowing whenever possible. In order to gain a deeper understanding of some of these elements of prevention education, in the following sections I elaborate on the stated pedagogical model.

Responses regarding the age of prevention were split into two camps. Most of the survivors and staff believed that prevention education should occur somewhere between seven and 10 years old. Seshia (2005) and Sethi (2007) asserted that Indigenous victims of sexual exploitation are typically recruited between 10 and 13 years old. Efforts toward prevention education for students in Grades 3 and 4 may encounter significant resistance. Concerned parents may be hesitant to expose their children to subject matter they deem inappropriate. Furthermore, policies like section 50.1 of the Alberta School Act (Young, 2015) may limit prevention from reaching girls who have endured multiple pathways by allowing parents to remove students from classes that discuss sex and sexuality. Moreover, designers of prevention education must consider the limitations created by school attendance. One survivor spoke to the conundrum of educating a demographic dropping out at an early age: “I wasn’t going to school when I went on the streets. I was already out of school for how many years. That would have never helped me” (as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 202). There are a range of potential responses to the truancy of students experiencing the greatest threat of exploitation. The first, as practised in the research, is implementing prevention prior to both the age of exploitation and the expected drop-off of school attendance. Second, on-reserve programs could hire liaisons with strong community relationships to encourage potential program participants by offering support, transportation, and regular reminders.

The approach survivors most frequently recommended was to avoid engaging youth with distant professionals lacking a fundamental understanding of Indigenous people. Nearly all the survivors shared experiences of frustrating relationships with teachers, psychiatrists, and social workers who operated on a set of predetermined assumptions. “You know, you don’t go sit me in your office with your pinstripe suit and your pencils and your paperwork, and you sign here and you sign there. You know what that is? That is a system” (survivor, as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 203). A second survivor shared

an experience of opening up to a mental health professional about her experiences of rape, sexual abuse, and violence. The psychiatrist spoke only two words to her, “Alright then,” and left the room, only to write a prescription that would lead to a future addiction, further solidifying her distrust in authority figures (Louie, 2016, p. 203). Based on these negative experiences, survivors recommended that prevention include grandmothers, aunts, and other respected women from the community. Perhaps additional considerations for future programs could include positive male relationships with grandfathers, uncles, and respected men in the community. It is imperative to establish a caring relationships for meaningful educational programs to succeed.

Survivors stressed the need for a teacher or support worker who would be accessible beyond the limits of a conventional school day. The structured nature of schooling, which relies on schedules, limits access to teachers and misses potential opportunities to support students in crisis. One survivor recalled, “I just didn’t know if I would make it out of this day alive. I needed her right here and right now” (as cited in Louie, 2016, p. 181). Perhaps traditionally structured schools that limit teacher–student relationships require revisiting if they are to meet the needs of oppressed populations.

### **Cycle of Resistance Model**

The conceptual model presented in Figure 4, which I designed based on the findings of this research, highlights the tensions between colonization and the self-determination of Indigenous girls.

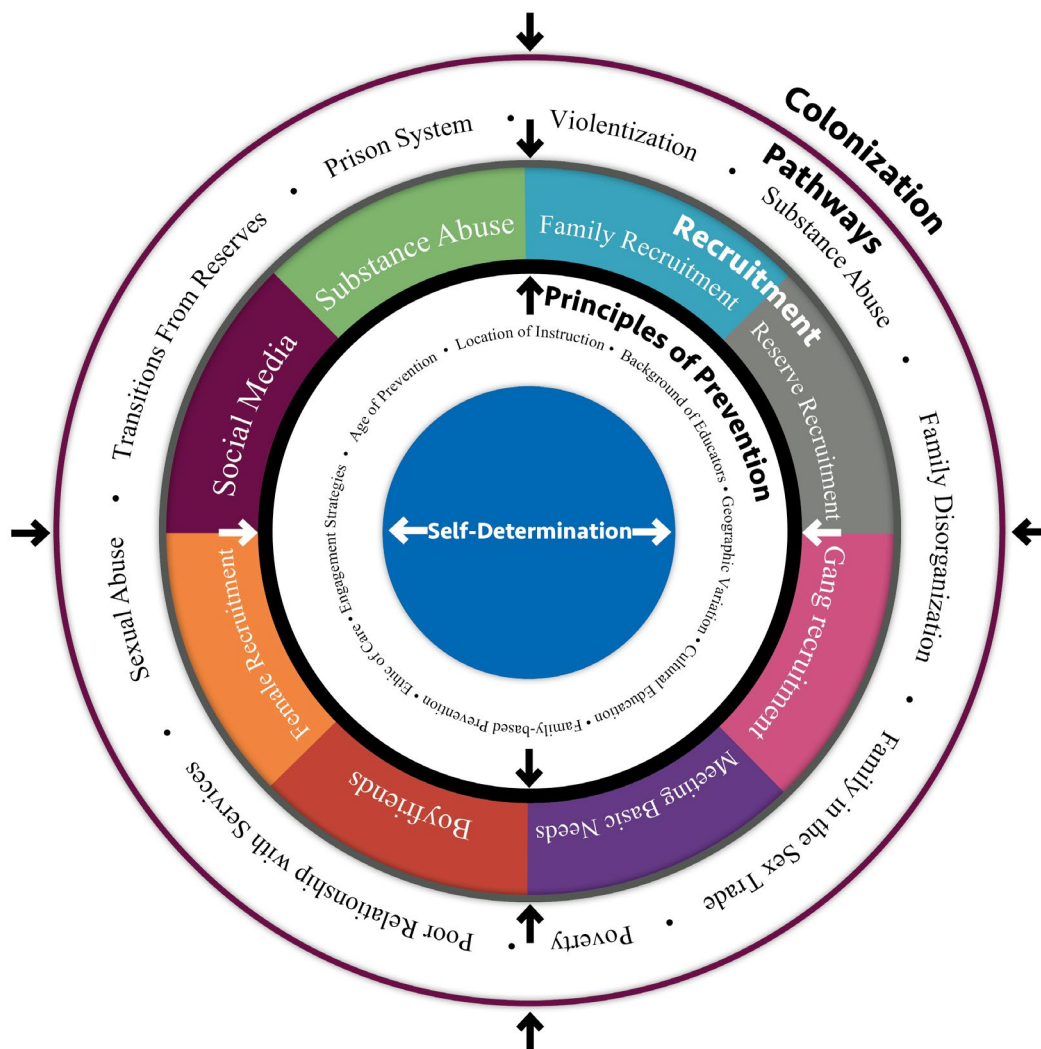


Figure 4. Cycle of resistance model

The arrows outside the circle represent the myriad pressures from colonizing forces on pathways and recruitment mechanisms. Colonization, realized through IRS, assumptions of white supremacy, and systemic oppression, establishes an environment in which Indigenous girls endure the pathways at an increased rate. Moreover, colonization influences predators to recruit Indigenous girls as a result of societal devaluation of Indigenous femininity. The pathways layer is populated by the life experiences that both cause and predict an increased threat of sexual exploitation for Indigenous girls. The recruitment layer indicates the individuals and strategies found to encourage entry into exploitation.



Principles of prevention, which are the pedagogical recommendations established in this research, form a barrier between self-determination and predatory elements aiming to infiltrate the lives of Indigenous girls. Self-determination is recognized as the ultimate goal of Indigenous research and education (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999). Within this model, education is used to preserve Indigenous girls' opportunity to seek self-determination by defending against the pervasive pressure of sexual exploitation through colonization, pathways, and recruitment. Self-determination and principles of prevention expand outward in this model, resisting the inward constriction of colonization, pathways, and recruitment. The point of tension between principles of prevention pushing outward and recruitment encroaching inward is the space in which education can establish resistance against sexual exploitation.

In the cycle of resistance model, the principles of prevention are recommendations for establishing prevention programming that can take up the imperative work of creating resistance against unrelenting pressures. Success in prevention education may ensure that cohorts have defences to resist sexual exploitation, but prevention education cannot dismantle colonization. Disruptive systemic innovations are required to address the fallout and persistent elements of colonization in Western societies in order to mitigate and eventually eliminate the sexualization of Indigenous femininity and the tacit acceptability of exploiting Indigenous girls. A single project cannot address centuries of colonial mindsets alone.

In this model, regionally specific findings populate pathways, recruitment, and principles of prevention. The transferability of this framework allows advocates in Vancouver, Winnipeg, or any affected city to employ the model, researching and populating the layers with findings unique to their context. Building upon the framework, they could establish prevention curricula based on the findings inserted into the cycle of resistance model. The cycle of resistance model represents a potentially significant contribution to the field created through the findings and conceptualization of this study.

## **Schools as a Medium of Change**

My aim in writing this article was to encourage research-informed curriculum designed for schools with Indigenous populations. Police forces, social services, and the healthcare

system have all been pressured to attend to their responsibilities regarding the fallout of the IRS era (TRC, 2015). Schools, despite their central role in curating an oppressive environment, often shirk their responsibility to address the intergenerational trauma established in colonial schooling. Merely teaching about IRS is not enough. Canadian schools are often unresponsive to the needs of Indigenous students—streaming them into non-academic courses, disregarding Indigenous ways of knowing, and implicitly defining Indigenous youth as not being “real” students (Louie & Scott, 2016).

Additional questions arise regarding the level of education authority required to enact systemic change. Given that initial prevention education initiatives are directed toward on-reserve schools, an argument could be made for federal approaches to this phenomenon. However, short-term approaches would likely be far more effective if grassroots or community-level responses could model possibilities for wider provincial or federal adoption.

Goulet and Goulet (2014) argued that negative expectations have plagued Indigenous students through internalized oppression and systemic discrimination. Prevention education need not be conceptualized as a negative expectation; instead, it would prove empowering to frame this process as one that would form allies and leaders for—and of—Indigenous girls. Based on the findings of this research, developing life skills and attending to trauma would be foundational elements of these courses. Developers of any curriculum need to focus primarily on empowering Indigenous girls to become leaders, building from Smith’s (1999) belief that research and education should aim to encourage self-determination. Direct prevention approaches should be included in any curriculum, but should always be framed as a crisis of predators and not a deficiency in or inherent victimization of Indigenous girls. Utilizing the capacity of strong Indigenous women as educators could model another way of being, shifting expectations for some youth experiencing internalized oppression and low expectations based on a confluence of negative life experiences.

Despite the overwhelming systemic barriers facing meaningful avenues of change for allies working as advocates for Indigenous girls, nothing is gained from becoming mired in frustration. Sexual exploitation survivors who overcame unspeakable trauma to remove themselves from cycles of violence, substance abuse, and sexual exploitation later in adulthood model a tenacity most can only hope to achieve. Researchers and educators have the responsibility to work to interrupt cycles of trauma for Indigenous

girls stemming from the IRS era. Every survivor interviewed spoke of one person in her life, often a teacher or support worker, who continued fighting for her, caring for her, and treating her with humanity. As researchers and educators, we should aim to be the one person who helps change the lives of students growing up in an environment lacking hope and possibility, ensuring humanity and care for all students who enter our classrooms.

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