

## What is sexual exploitation?

This brochure is intended to provide information to women and their loved ones about issues related to sexual exploitation. In addition to assisting the reader in understanding what sexual exploitation is, it provides helpful types and resources that may assist in exiting sexual exploitive relationships.

“The term ‘sexual exploitation’ means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”<sup>1</sup>

### Myth vs. Fact

**Myth:** Women are always sexually exploited by strangers.

**Fact:** Those who sexually exploit women are not always strangers. Women are often sexually exploited by parents, husbands, boyfriends, relatives, friends, teachers or bosses.

**Myth:** Only sex trade workers are sexually exploited.

**Fact:** Sexual exploitation can happen to anyone regardless of class, sex or occupation; they are our mothers, our children, our cousins and our friends. It

can happen anywhere; in the home, on the streets, in hotel rooms, at a friend’s place or at the workplace.

**Myth:** Sexual exploitation always involves physical violence.

**Fact:** Sexual exploitation can also be subtle, including demeaning sexual comments or controlling behaviours. Some women do not recognize they are being sexually exploited.

### Am I being sexually exploited?

- Do you feel you must give sex for money, food, drugs, or a place to sleep?
- Have you ever been a target of sexual solicitation, including uninvited or unwanted requests to engage in sexual activities or explicit conversations in person, on the phone, or over the internet?<sup>2</sup>
- Do you feel someone will hurt you unless you are sexually active with them?<sup>3</sup>
- Does someone make you feel guilty for not engaging in sex or a sexual relationship?<sup>4</sup>
- Has someone convinced you to move away from your home and community for sexual purposes?
- Has someone ever touched themselves inappropriately in front of you, or touched you<sup>5</sup> when it is unwanted?

## If I am sexually exploited, what do I need to know?

**It’s not your fault.** No one deserves or asks to be sexually exploited for any reason.

**There is help available.** Find out about your options by talking with women’s resource or community centres. You can speak to them about advocacy, legal support, health care, cultural programming, housing, counselling, crisis services, information on street programs and addiction services.

**If you need immediate help,** call 911 or the local police. Keep emergency phone numbers with you.

**If you need a safe place** to go, there may be emergency shelters in your area. There may also be safe, low-income housing available if you cannot afford regular housing and need to find a safe place to live.

**If you need food, clothing,** or other items such as, condoms, or clean needles, you can often get these from community centres for free.

## What can you do?

**Reach out to others.** Speak to a trusted Elder, family member, health care provider or friend or find someone to talk to at support groups or drop-in centres.

**Set up a buddy system** with someone you trust. Keep them up-to-date about where you are. You might want to share your contact information with them.

**Create an exit or emergency plan.** Find out where the shelters are and who you can contact for quick help. Have a bag ready for you and your children in case you have to leave in a hurry. You may want to speak to a councillor or another professional to help you plan a safe exit.

### It’s Complicated

Exiting a sexually exploitive situation whether it be a relationship or an occupation can often be difficult and complicated for a variety of reasons including division of property, child custody and welfare concerns, and fear of escalated violence. It is important that you make informed decisions about how you will deal with issues such as these. There are services available to assist you in addressing these concerns.

