

NEWS BULLETIN  
Monday, March 30, 2026

## RCMP in British Columbia Begin Targeting Sex Trade Online

**New Counter Human Trafficking Unit identified more than 100  
clients, resulting in multiple arrests**



**An RCMP analyst works on her laptop researching men seeking sexual services from undercover officers.** Photo: Courtesy of B.C. RCMP

On March 17, Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Richmond, B.C., announced in a news release that on March 12 undercover officers had posted decoy advertisements offering sexual services on online platforms and communicated with and identified more than 100 clients attempting to arrange sexual services transactions.

The RCMP news release stated that multiple arrests had been made, but to that date, no charges had been laid. According to Staff Sgt. Kris Clark, approval of charges rests with the B.C. Prosecution Service, and that it's "too early to say what charges, if any, may result."

In a statement to CTV News on March 18, RCMP clarified that the goal of their public communications is to warn individuals seeking sexual services that they're at risk of being arrested and charged.

According to B.C. RCMP Counter Human Trafficking Unit Insp. Lyndsay O'Ruairc: "When you seek sexual services online, you have no way of knowing who you are communicating with, it could be a police officer, or it could be a vulnerable victim of human trafficking."

The original RCMP news release also states that: "While independent, voluntary sex work exists in B.C., the B.C. RCMP emphasizes that purchasing sexual services remains illegal under Canadian law."

Police stings targeting people purchasing sex via online ads are not new in Canada. Up until now those counter-human-trafficking operations have invariably focused on police posing as minors. Because it's illegal to actually advertise sexual services of someone underage (no platform allows it), the fake sex ads must state an age that is legal.

In Vancouver for example the fake ads on the classified advertising website LeoList stated the advertiser was 19. In Niagara Falls, the advertisement stated the advertiser was 20. Undercover officers then inform respondents to the ad—often through an exchange of text messages—that the person to provide the sexual service is under the age of 18. In order to make arrests, detectives communicate arrangements to meet at a hotel for the sexual encounter, where the arrest is made.

### **First Stings Online in Canada**

In 2017, in Ontario, the Durham Regional Police Human Trafficking Unit announced the results of a four-year effort titled "Operation Raphael" that produced 104 arrests. Officers posing as underage sex workers "chatted online" with the men, who were then charged with offences including communicating for the purposes of obtaining sexual services of a person under 18. Sensational news reports inaccurately headlined "Online ad for sex with kids gets 6,678 clicks in four days" and reported that the ads "received messages from more than 600 phone numbers."

In 2018, in Vancouver, 47 men were arrested following a two-month operation that targeted people seeking sex with youths between the ages of 15 and 17. According to Vancouver Deputy Chief Const. Laurence Rankin, "I want to make it clear that these projects were not about sexual activity between two consenting adults."

## Supreme Court Rejects Entrapment as a Defence

Police cannot induce someone to commit a crime or provide opportunities to commit a crime. There is an exception, however, when there is a “reasonable suspicion over a sufficiently precise space” and a “genuine purpose of investigating and repressing crime.” Court cases stemming from these arrests eventually wound their way to the Supreme Court of Canada, resulting in the decision, *R. v. Ramelson* in November 2022.

Writing for a unanimous Court, Justice Andromache Karakatsanis said “Project Raphael” was a bona fide inquiry because “police had reasonable suspicion in a space defined with sufficient precision.” This online ‘virtual space’ was the York Region escort subdirectory of the (now defunct) classified advertising website Backpage.com, where the particular type of ads emphasized the sex workers’ younger ages. She also said that the offences police provided the men with the opportunity to commit “were rationally connected and proportionate” to the offences police suspected were occurring in that virtual space.

To determine whether an investigation is ‘precisely defined’ when conducted on broad virtual spaces such as the Internet, courts must look at the space’s function, its interactivity and the sub-spaces embedded into the broader virtual space.

This particular decision in *R. v. Ramelson* relates to charges under Criminal Code Section 286.1(2), “Obtaining sexual services for consideration from person under 18 years.” However, it is obvious that the slippery slope established in this ruling could lead to police investigations of sexual services between consenting adults under Section 286.1(1), “Obtaining sexual services for consideration.” “Everyone who, in any place, obtains for consideration, or communicates with anyone for the purpose of obtaining for consideration, the sexual services of a person is guilty of an indictable offence...”

Since the 2022 Supreme Court of Canada decision, there have been further online advertising stings:

- In 2023 in Toronto (Durham Region, “Project Firebird”)
- In 2024 in Niagara region
- In 2025 in London, Ontario, and Toronto (Peel Region)
- And, most recently in February 2026, in Toronto (Durham Region).

All of these operations continued to target men who ended up seeking sexual services from someone underage. In most of these enforcement operations, police released the names of the accused caught up in the stings, along with their cities of residence and their ages.

Notably, in the case of one operation in Peel Region in 2025 (“Project Juno”), some men—likely prospective clients—reported the ads to the police and to Crime Stoppers out of concern for the undercover officer presenting herself as a teen.

## First Online Sting Targeting Adult Sex Services

It would appear that the slippery slope established in *R. v. Ramelson* has led to this latest sting operation. In March 2026, Richmond RCMP and the B.C. RCMP Counter Human Trafficking Unit did not limit their investigation to only those who would seek sex with minors, but instead focused on deterring communicating for sexual services entirely.

According to RCMP Staff Sgt. Kris Clark:

“Ultimately, the deterrence we create... is an immeasurable and important part of preventing human trafficking and exploitation... It is the consumer demand that fuels human sex trafficking and creates situations where vulnerable people are exploited, and others profit from that exploitation.

“Without consumerism, there is no need for sexual exploitation. And while we will never remove consumerism entirely by these projects, deterring some from engaging makes human sex trafficking less lucrative.”

It is wise to remember that in the preamble to the 2014 Canadian law, *The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, parliament emphasized its intention that: “... it is important to denounce and prohibit the purchase of sexual services because it creates a demand for prostitution.”

When B.C. Solicitor General and Public Safety Minister Nina Krieger, announced the new Counter Human Trafficking Unit (CHTU) on July 30, 2025—the 12th annual U.N. World Day Against Trafficking in Persons—she clarified the CHTU’s mandate: “To be clear, those who engage in sex work out of their own choice are not the targets of our province’s response to human trafficking.” B.C. RCMP Chief Supt. Elijah Rain also stated that the CHTU “will not focus on sex workers engaged in consensual sex work.”

So far with British Columbia’s focus on clients, this has been true. However, in other provinces, including recently in Alberta, online stings have also focused on targeting ads for sexual services where undercover officers posed as prospective clients.

In January 2025, ALERT—the Alberta Law Enforcement Response Team’s Human Trafficking and Counter Exploitation Unit—carried out “Operation Coven.”

Out of hundreds of ads online, the team selected a handful they believed were worth investigating and undercover officers, posing as clients, responded to the ads and set up fake “dates” which ALERT calls “interventions.” Once a meeting was arranged, usually at a hotel, officers did a safety check before entering followed by social workers, while a team of more than a dozen police remained in constant contact. While most of the women were clear that they didn’t need any help, ALERT claims it has rescued or provided other support to more than 180 since its inception in 2020.

Meanwhile, in British Columbia, it is now clear that, despite previous assurances to the contrary, there is a significant change in policing focus with regard to sexual activity between consenting adults.

For a complete list of the news stories used to prepare this report see: Press Coverage: 'John Stings' Under PCEPA  
<https://walnet.org/csis/news/pcepa-johnstings.html>

- 30 -

**Media inquiries**

Andy Sorfleet  
a.sorfleet@gmail.com  
604-488-0710

**Social media**

X/@xxxworkers  
Instagram.com/triplexworkers  
Facebook.com/triplexworkers

**About Triple-X**

Triple-X Workers' Solidarity Association of B.C. is a registered non-profit association in British Columbia since February 2012.

Persons can become members of the Triple-X Workers' Solidarity Association of B.C. if they have agreed to the direct exchange of sexual stimulation for financial compensation within the last six months and they intend to continue to work in the Triple-X industry. The full list of Triple-X membership criteria as defined in our Constitution, Bylaws & Policies are available on our bylaws webpage: <https://triple-x.org/about/bylaws.html>.