



Human Trafficking

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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There are some things in life that we just don't want to know or talk about but burying our heads in the sand doesn't solve the issues. In fact, ignoring difficult situations just allows them to grow and our inaction actually cast us into the role of being an accessory.

Today I am writing about a very difficult subject – missing children and human trafficking.

According to statistics published by the *Missing Children's Database*, approximately 50,000 children go missing in Canada each year. Some are found and some return home on their own. Not all of them were trafficked. *Public Safety for Canada*, however, reported that human trafficking in Canada increased 44% from 2019 to 2020. They claim that approximately 500 individuals fell into this category, but this number is likely very low compared to reality as not all cases are reported or categorized accurately.

Research reveals that the problems are significant internationally, nationally, and locally.

Canada has been investing \$57.22 million dollars in a five-year project entitled "The National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking". Their mandate involves protecting vulnerable individuals from being trafficked, empowering survivors, bringing perpetrators to justice and safeguarding out communities.

The Action Coalition on Human Trafficking Alberta and the *Alberta government's Human Trafficking Task Force* chaired by country music artist Paul Brandt wakes up to the fact that missing children and human trafficking is not just an international problem far from our eyes but is a very prevalent problem right on our doorsteps. In fact, Alberta has the third highest number of cases in Canada.

Human trafficking, according to Wikipedia is the third largest crime industry in the world, behind drug dealing and arms trafficking and the fastest-growing activity of trans-national criminal organizations. It involves the trade of humans for forced labour, sexual slavery or commercial sexual exploitation. It also involves forced marriage and extradition of organs or tissues for sale. Victims are held against their will and can be abused physically, mentally, sexually while being forced to do exploitative and damaging tasks. The *International Labour Organization* reports that as of 2014 forced labour alone generates an estimated \$150 billion in profits.

So maybe you didn't want to know about missing children or child trafficking. You can't unring a bell and I have just rung the bell that means you are now aware. What are you going to do about it? My hope is that you will do more research to determine how you can help.

Tim Ballard, a former United States government agent was determined to help. He quit his United States job as a government agent and now devotes his life to rescuing children from global sex traffickers. His fascinating true-life story has recently been portrayed in the movie "Sound of Freedom" where he is played by award-winning actor Jim Caviezel. Powerful!

You don't have to be a Tim Ballard to be part of the solution. But you do need to be informed and willing to fight for what is right in whatever way you can. Maybe that means just helping others to be informed so they can learn how to protect our children from becoming statistics.