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compliments and gifts.

"That's how they get their hooks in," said Setaram. "That luring and grooming stage can take a day, can take a month, can take a year."

They prey on individuals who might share their problems on social media, making it easy for them to target their needs. The Romeo pimp will often offer a victim who is in an unstable life situation money, and the idea of a safe place to stay.

"They sell them a dream," said Setaram. "They don't always deliver... often times that exploitive piece comes right away."

She says a lot of victims have trouble seeing how they are being exploited, because there is a perceived level of trust, and love established.

"That's why Romeo pimps are so dangerous and it's so insidious because it looks like love," she said. "They can't see that external disconnect."



2013 Halton police investigated 1 occurrence for sex trafficking, and made 1 arrest



2014 Halton Police investigated 2 occurrences, and made 6 arrests



2015 Halton Police investigated 8 incidents and made 13 arrests



2016 Halton police investigated 4 and arrested 8



2017 Halton Police investigated 11 occurrences and made 10 arrests



2018 Halton police so far have investigated 11 and made 9 arrests

Metroland graphic

SAVIS operates through a model of feminist counselling, which provides clients the information they need to self-identify and make their own decisions to leave sex work when they are ready.

For someone who is working in the industry on a daily basis, whose friends and life is entirely connected to the world,

leaving can be extraordinarily difficult. "That's what they know, that's what they find comfort in," said Setaram. "You're leaving a whole network of what's familiar. It can be very isolating, it can be very lonely."

Halton Region is one stop along the 401 corridor where pimps commonly move their workers from

hotel to hotel from Niagara Falls to Ottawa.

"It's easier just to continue to move someone," said Setaram, noting that with Halton being a more affluent community, workers can make more, for less sessions in the area.

Setaram says that she has clients who work in Acton and Georgetown as

THE ISSUE:
CASES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN HALTON ARE ON THE RISE
LOCAL IMPACT:
SAVIS SUPPORT WORKER'S CURRENT CASELOAD INCLUDES A DOZEN INDIVIDUALS, MOST RELATED TO THE SEX TRADE

well.

"From a trafficking perspective, some small towns are great. You come in, you go out, nobody notices," she said. People assume it's a big city problem, it's not, it's a Canada problem."

SAVIS works alongside with HRPS to make presentations across Halton, spreading awareness about human trafficking and how to recognize the signs that someone is being groomed.

"It revolves around education," said Ciardullo, who says the majority of the individuals they find involved in sex work are

young.

He says they have identified victims from Milton, Acton and Georgetown, however the investigations usually stem from more southern parts of the region along the 401 and QEW corridors.

"It's happening here," he said.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Victims are often lured into human trafficking under the illusion of a romantic relationship, with some offenders starting at quite a young age.

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