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‘Why do men think it's OK to buy these girls?’

Josh Healey | Posted: Sept. 18, 2018, 6 a.m. | Updated: Sept. 18, 2018, 7:49 a.m. | 4 Min Read



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HALIFAX, N.S. - It's been months since her daughter's pimps were sentenced, but a Halifax mother says not enough is being done to address human trafficking in Nova Scotia.

"My daughter will die before my 50th birthday and they got six ... years," she said.

Her daughter is a human trafficking victim and, according to the mother, emblematic of an issue that has lain dormant in the province for years.

"Why are we just clueing into this now?" she asked. "I know what goes on in my city."

Due to a publication ban, both the daughter and mother's identities are being withheld.

But during the course of the trial, she heard things no mother wants to hear about their daughter.

"I am trying to show the world that people live in these situations," she said.

According to court documents, her daughter met Leslie Gray through her then-boyfriend and moved in with him in 2015.

Her daughter, who was struggling with addiction and mental health issues, was 20 at the time.

Gray began to advertise her daughter online, selling her body at \$180 per hour. Her daughter was forced to turn over all the money she earned to Gray and was threatened repeatedly if she tried to keep any for herself.

At one point, Gray and his brother Andre, who pleaded guilty in November 2017 to uttering threats, discussed killing her daughter and throwing her body into a river.

On another occasion, the brothers said they would cut her daughter up and feed her to a dinner party.

The young woman lived with Leslie Gray for a total of six months.

Sometimes, she attended as many as 20 calls a day. It is during this time that she contracted HIV.

The mother said that people are afraid to talk about the sex trade, leading to ideas about human trafficking being dominated by lies and stereotypes.

"We think that because people buy them, these girls want to do it," she said, explaining that to survive, victims will do almost anything.

"A lot of sex trade workers have criminal records for shoplifting and in my daughter's case, she shoplifted food and tampons. They're not stealing Gucchi watches. They're stealing tampons and nail polish and mascara and Advil."

Her daughter eventually went to the police and Gray pleaded guilty to four charges, including receiving financial benefit from human trafficking.

In her sentencing decision last January, Judge Elizabeth Buckle noted the exploitive situation that victims find themselves in.

"The pimp forces or coerces the prostitute to use his or her body with little or no compensation," the judge said.

"In those circumstances, the relationship cannot be viewed as employment in the sex trade, it is exploitation. As a result, that relationship has been described, correctly in my view, as a form of slavery."

But the convictions, explained the mother, can't do justice to the trauma her daughter experienced.

With credit for his remand time, Gray was sentenced to 30 months.

"This is where I want to see justice, this is where I want closure," she said of the sentence. "What about the victims? What about my daughter who got HIV? Her life (expectancy) is cut in half."

Following the trial, her daughter ran away from home, leaving the mother heartbroken.

"When people are drug addicts and have trauma, they run away," she said. "They continuously run away."

But now, the mother said she is speaking up and sharing her story to help improve the system.

She noted that victims don't know what services are available to them and are scared to come forward due to threats and shaming.

Another issue is social media.

According to the mother, victims are approached, advertised and sold online.

When asked how to stop human trafficking, she stressed removing victims from social media and addressing the people who pay for sex.

"Why do men think it's OK to buy these girls?" she asked.

She also said human trafficking isn't something that takes place in far-flung places. It happened to her daughter right here in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

"It doesn't matter if you have a mother or father, " she said. "It doesn't matter if you're loved. Sometimes you feel neglected and these people seem to get you at this point. It's not easy growing up."

When asked where her daughter is now, she said she was unsure.

"I don't know."

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