

News media reinforce sexual exploitation stereotypes

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News stories about sexually exploited youth in Canada perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes, according to new research from the University of British Columbia.

The study, recently published in the *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, found that stories seldom focus on perpetrators, do not capture the diversity of victims, and use words that legitimize the illegal act of [sexual exploitation](#) committed against youth.

"Our research shows that [news](#) reports commonly use words that portray exploitive experiences as 'business' or 'trade,' and sometimes call exploiters 'customers' – if they mention those who are buying sex at all," says Elizabeth Saewyc, lead author of the study and professor at the UBC School of Nursing. "This has consequences for how society views these young people and their situation, and what we do about it."

Researchers examined 835 Canadian print news articles and compared them to existing research about sexually exploited youth. Their findings show that Canadian print media typically portrayed a specific image of sexual exploitation, often older teenage girls on street corners, even though research evidence shows nearly equal rates of exploitation among girls and boys.

"If you're a young person being exploited, but you constantly hear that only certain kinds of people are exploited, or only in these stereotypical ways, you may not even recognize this is what's happening to you," says

Saewyc. "We hoped our study would show improvements in reporting over time, but that isn't what we found."

Saewyc believes service providers and researchers can be advocates for accurate reporting, but editors and reporters have a responsibility to avoid [stereotypes](#). She recommends that [news stories](#) place greater focus on the exploiters and more accurately reflect the experiences of victims of sexual exploitation.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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