



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 110

Thursday, May 23, 2024

Chair: Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman



Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thursday, May 23, 2024

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): I will call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 109 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Before we begin, I would like to ask all members and other in-person participants to consult the cards on the tables for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

Please take note of the following preventative measures in place to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. Only use a black approved earpiece. The former grey earpieces must no longer be used. Please keep your earpieces away from your microphones at all times. When you are not using your earpiece, place it down on the sticker placed on the table for this purpose.

For all members, please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Thanks to all of you in advance for your co-operation on that.

For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will certainly manage the speaking list.

I do have my 30-second reminder. I also have a “time is up” reminder as well.

For the benefit of the witnesses, I'd like to make a few comments.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating by video conference, click on the video conference microphone icon to activate your microphone, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those of you in the room, your microphone will be controlled by the proceeding and verifications officer.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available. You have the choice of floor, English or French for your earpiece. If interpretation is lost, please let me know right away and we'll get it back on track.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, November 27, 2023, the committee will continue its study of coercive behaviour.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I'd like to also provide the trigger warning that we will be discussing experiences related to violence and coercive control. This may be triggering to viewers with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or need help, please advise the clerk.

For all the witnesses and for all members of Parliament, it is important to recognize that these are indeed difficult discussions. Let's try to be as compassionate as possible in our conversations.

At this point, I would like to welcome our witnesses.

We have, as an individual, Jennifer Koshan, professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, joining us by video conference; from Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, Karine Barrette, lawyer and project manager, and Louise Riendeau, co-responsible for political affairs; and from the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, Roxana Parsa, staff lawyer, joining us by video conference.

You will each have five minutes for opening remarks followed by rounds of questions.

I will give the floor to Ms. Koshan to start. Then we'll give the floor to Ms. Barrette and Ms. Riendeau for a shared five minutes, and then to Ms. Parsa.

We'll begin.

• (1535)

Professor Jennifer Koshan (Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, As an Individual): Thank you very much for the opportunity to engage in your committee study of coercive control.

I'm joining you today from Treaty 7 territory in Mohkinstsis, which is the Blackfoot word for Calgary.

I'm speaking today on my own behalf, but I did file a submission with the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights for its study of Bill C-332 with three co-authors in March 2024. Our submission raised concerns with the criminalization of coercive control. I will not repeat those concerns in these opening remarks but certainly will welcome questions on that subject.

In my time today, I'll focus on research that I've conducted with colleagues Janet Mosher and Wanda Wieggers that examines how coercive control is being interpreted and applied under the Divorce Act. This research reveals several concerns, two of which I'll highlight today.

First, coercive control is being used against survivors. We found several cases where coercive control has been interpreted broadly by family courts—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're going to have to interrupt for a moment and suspend. We have a situation with earpieces. There are several that are not working. I'm terribly sorry that I have to interrupt you. We will suspend for a few minutes to get the earpieces working.

• (1535)

(Pause)

• (1535)

The Chair: Ms. Koshan, you can continue.

We paused your time, of course, so you can carry on from where you left off. Thank you.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Thank you.

Again, our first concern is that coercive control is being used against survivors. While it may seem like a positive development that coercive control is being interpreted broadly by family courts, findings of coercive control are being made against mothers who seek to protect their children from family violence by limiting contact with abusive fathers. So-called parental alienation arguments are often raised by fathers in response to claims of abuse, and courts are sometimes finding women to be perpetrators of coercive control simply for trying to protect their children. In other cases, where women's claims of abuse are not substantiated, this too can be construed as family violence on their part, based on myths and stereotypes about false allegations of violence being made by women who are seeking purported strategic advantage in family law proceedings.

These cases reveal a failure by courts to understand the difference between protective behaviour by mothers on one hand and actual coercive control by fathers on the other hand. They also confirm not just the challenges of proving coercive control for abused women but how their inability to prove coercive control can be used against them. In this respect our research supports the recommendations of the National Association of Women and the Law about the need to limit arguments of parental alienation before family courts. Overall, the family law system indicates that judges are struggling to understand coercive control and the types of evidence that can help establish it. Education of all legal professionals is required and must be undertaken before any new offence of coercive control is implemented in Canada.

A second concern is that survivors need supports to protect themselves against litigation and systems abuse, including in family law cases. We know that abusers often use litigation as a way of furthering their coercive control. In the criminal law sphere, there are protections for complainant/witnesses, such as limits on cross-examination by self-represented accused persons, and the option of testifying behind a screen or with a support person is permitted by the judge. However, this type of protection does not exist in the Divorce Act.

To provide an example, we came across one case from 2023 in which a self-represented father, who was found to have engaged in family violence, was permitted to cross-examine his wife for seven

days. While the judge permitted her to testify behind a screen, that ruling was discretionary, and we found that this type of measure is rarely ordered in family law cases involving claims of coercive control. This type of litigation conduct can itself amount to family violence, yet, as noted, it's rare for courts in the family law realm to place limits on it. Our Divorce Act research therefore shows that amendments are required to limit this type of abusive litigation conduct by restricting personal cross-examination and allowing testimony behind screens, and with supports for family litigants.

By way of comparison, in the United Kingdom, reforms to the Domestic Abuse Act in 2021 allow courts to put these types of special measures in place to protect survivors of abuse in family law proceedings, and some Australian states do as well. Overall, we can glean lessons from legal responses to coercive control from other jurisdictions, but also from within Canada, when looking at how the Divorce Act is being implemented. We also need to be mindful of how women experiencing intersecting inequalities can face challenges in having their claims heard and accepted in ways that are trauma informed and informed by principles of substantive equality.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1540)

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Riendeau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau (Co-responsible for Political Affairs, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): Good afternoon.

We want to thank the committee for the opportunity to express our views on coercive behaviour today.

Our association comprises 46 shelters for women victims of domestic violence, which are scattered across Quebec. Every year, they accommodate some 3,300 women and nearly 2,000 children to whom they provide 30,000 homelessness services. In all, they respond to 90,000 requests for assistance.

Coercive behaviour—

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm so sorry, Chair, but I'm not getting translation.

The Chair: We are suspended for a minute while we sort out the translation.

• (1540)

(Pause)

• (1545)

The Chair: We will resume the meeting. Again, I apologize for the disruption.

Please continue.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Coercive behaviour isn't a new form of domestic violence or a synonym for psychological violence. Instead it's a term that reflects a broader vision of domestic violence. The main reason why women seek assistance at our shelters isn't physical violence, but rather other forms of violence. More than 44% of the women who receive outpatient services do so as a result of violence following a separation.

With funding from Women and Gender Equality Canada, we are conducting a project to encourage the various legal actors to incorporate the concept of coercive control in their practices. Now more than two years since it started, the project has had a major impact. First, we've created a tool box for legal actors and a booklet for the women themselves.

In addition, more than 6,000 professionals have received training to assist them in more effectively detecting coercive control. As a result, coercive control strategies are beginning to feature in police reports. We have also noticed that legal actors have acquired a clearer understanding of the risk associated with coercive control, particularly in preventing homicides.

Furthermore, Quebec's Ministry of Public Security has expanded the victim statement to include coercive control elements and has broadcast a webinar intended for all police officers in the province. It has also developed a "police placement", a kind of checklist to be used at all police stations.

In addition, the director of criminal and penal prosecutions now requests that prosecutors take coercive control into account in the violent cases they handle.

Lastly, we are now witnessing a change in the way domestic violence is presented and discussed in the media.

These changes lead us to believe that the legal community is now focusing more clearly on coercive control. The Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale advocates for the criminalization of coercive control. It supports Bill C-332, as it was amended by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In our view, criminalization would help validate the experience of the victims and their children and demonstrate that this behaviour is socially unacceptable. This would represent a significant step toward securing women's rights to safety, dignity, autonomy and freedom.

This new offence would also help provide legal professionals with additional tools to break the cycle of violence at an earlier

stage and to intervene appropriately given the dangerous nature of this type of violence.

Ms. Karine Barrette (Lawyer and Project Manager, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): Last year, we met with stakeholders from England and Scotland to survey the lessons that the criminalization of coercive control has taught. They all agreed there was no going back. A few days from now, we will be starting a new mission to form a clearer picture of the development and handling of controlling and coercive conduct offences.

However, this criminalization effort must be supported by the necessary conditions for its success. First of all, it must be introduced gradually to enable legal professionals to prepare for its coming into force, and, second, victims must be invited to consultation sessions, including victims from indigenous communities.

Human and financial resources must obviously be provided so that actors have the necessary means to effect the desired changes in practice, and awareness and training activities should also be established within all justice system stakeholders, including judicial councils.

To do so, stakeholders should be able to rely on specialized domestic violence resources, and a public awareness campaign should be implemented. Efforts must also continue to ensure effective implementation of the national action plan to end to gender-based violence and to ensure that victims have access to assistance and support resources and receive adequate and recurring funding.

Lastly, legislative measures must be evaluated at regular intervals in co-operation with domestic violence experts and survivors.

Other measures are essential to enable women and children victims of domestic violence to escape that violence. For example, efforts must be made to develop social housing projects quickly, to make a resettlement assistance fund available to victims, as Australia is doing, and to facilitate access to a decent income.

The Regroupement welcomes the initiative of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which, by studying the concept of coercive control, is helping to recognize and shape a clearer understanding of this behaviour. This is how we'll be able to protect the victims.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Next, we have Roxana Parsa for five minutes.

• (1550)

Ms. Roxana Parsa (Staff Lawyer, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund): Good afternoon. My name is Roxana Parsa. I'm a staff lawyer at the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, also known as LEAF.

I'm grateful to appear today from what is now known as Toronto, which is on the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Wendat, Anishinabe and the Haudenosaunee nations.

As you know, LEAF is a national charitable organization that works to advance the equality rights of women, girls, trans and non-binary people through litigation, law reform and public education. For almost 40 years now, LEAF has advocated for the need to improve the justice system's response to gender-based violence.

Thank you for inviting me here today to speak about coercive control. We're glad to see this issue being the focus of study at this committee. As this committee has heard, coercive control is prevalent across societal lines. This can present as a pattern of abuse through threats, intimidation, control, and induced fear often over a span of many years. Coercive control can creep into and impact every aspect of someone's life, their financial freedom, their social life and community connections, physical freedom, with even elements such as immigration status being used as a threat. These patterns must be recognized as an insidious form of violence that can have devastating consequences.

However, it is this very nuanced and complex nature of coercive control that also makes a criminal legal response challenging and raises significant concerns about the implementation of any law. Frequent lack of physical evidence means that recognizing the existence of abuse requires an understanding of the nuances and context of a relationship, often over many years. How can a survivor show these layers of control to a police officer or provide enough evidence of psychological harm to meet the burden of proof required by a court? Even when an arrest occurs, the experiences in the United Kingdom have shown that the vast majority do not lead to charges, let alone a conviction. Moreover, how can we ensure that the police officer's discretion is being used in a manner that recognizes the subtle abuse when it is present.

The existence of systemic oppression, including histories of colonialism and racism embedded within the justice system, significantly heighten the potential for error or misapplication of law. We've seen similar risks arise in the past where mandatory charging policies have resulted in charges being brought against survivors of violence. Moreover, we know that the criminal law and the legal system broadly continue to fail survivors of gender-based violence. These systems are not providing justice, nor are they leading to more safety. We regularly hear about survivors who continue to be retraumatized through their experiences. Relying on the criminal legal system as a response to abuse may in fact unintentionally exclude many from even seeking assistance. Potential for harm is particularly heightened for survivors from already vulnerable communities, such as Black, indigenous, disabled, or non-status peoples, who have valid reasons for distrusting these systems. This only deepens the existing inequalities that exist.

The law does not exist in a vacuum and we think it's important to think about the realities of who is able to access the law and how it will be applied on the ground. This is why instead of focusing on the criminal law, we strongly recommend a diverted focus on prevention and education. This means providing increased funding for shelters and transitional housing in addition to funding affordable long-term housing for survivors to have places to live when they leave their relationships. We need ongoing and sustainable funding

for social services to provide trauma-informed anti-oppressive services like mental health care or child care so that survivors know they have places to turn for support. We also need more funding for programs like legal aid and independent legal advice so that survivors can get the legal assistance they may need to help figure out their options.

We also echo the many witnesses who have advocated for more education. We need mandatory training for actors in the justice system on coercive control as well as ongoing training on systemic bias and racism. We also need public education about coercive control so that survivors and their communities can recognize these patterns and feel validated and understand that it's being recognized as abuse.

For decades now, the increased rates in gender-based violence have consistently shown that turning to the criminal legal system has proven to be an ineffective response. We think it's time that we turn to focus on resourcing our communities and systems with the infrastructure required to create real safety for survivors and to allow them to move forward. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, all, very much for your opening remarks. We'll proceed with questions from members now.

I'll begin with Anna for six minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. My first question is for Jennifer.

You made a comment about education. I think that's important. We do have to educate not just the men in our lives, but also the judges and the lawyers to better understand what coercive control is. I'm going to refer to the importance of this on behalf of the children because they end up being the victims as well as the mothers in all of this.

I'm going to take you to an event that occurred on Christmas Day in December 2017. Chloe and Aubrey Berry, ages six and four, were found by police in a ground floor apartment in Oak Bay. They were murdered by their father. If you read through the court case, the mother was continually trying to advise the courts and nobody listened.

What advice would you provide to the courts today? This is just one of many cases that occur. How can we change that to criminalize the father, because we're protecting our children?

• (1555)

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Thank you very much for that question.

Yes, the Berry case is a very disturbing one. Sadly, it's only one of many cases of children being killed by abusive fathers.

Something we found in the Divorce Act research that I mentioned is that even though the Divorce Act now requires that children's exposure to family violence be taken into account when making parenting orders, it seems that courts are still really struggling to understand what that means. In many cases, what they look for is children having been directly exposed to violence, rather than also considering how children's indirect exposure to violence can have a very adverse impact on them.

What we see is it's very rare for things like supervised parenting orders to be made by the courts. Even if it is a case where criminal charges are laid, if a person is incarcerated, they get out of jail eventually.

What I'm encouraging the committee to do is to think not only about the criminal side of things, but also about the family law side of coercive control, and the need for courts and legal professionals to be educated so that they understand the impact on children and the need, sometimes, for parenting orders to be supervised to try to prevent these types of killings in the future.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: If we don't incarcerate them and have them go through treatments while they're incarcerated, how do we protect the children? That's what confuses me, because if they pay for their crimes, and if we educate them and work with them, hopefully, they will come out and be better people.

Do you agree?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I think training, counselling and those types of things can also occur without incarceration. In Alberta, where I'm from, our domestic violence courts use peace bonds quite regularly. This means that people are not incarcerated, but if they admit responsibility for the offence, they are still sent for treatment.

There's mixed evidence, though, on whether that type of treatment works, so again, what I'm encouraging is that criminal law be looked at alongside what happens in the family law realm so that we can be thinking about how these two systems work together. Look at the fact that sometimes, we need to have protections in the family law sphere, even if there has been treatment and/or incarceration in the criminal sphere.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you.

I'm going to ask Louise the same question.

We could look at many cases. We could look at Keira's law, which had the same situation. The father was very controlling. The child was ignored and the mother was ignored, and we had another tragedy.

We have to ensure that we protect the victims. How can we do that if we don't control the men who are committing the crime?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: You're right in saying that there's a major challenge in family law.

Every day, we see that judges often think that violence is committed against women and that there are no consequences for the children if there's no direct violence. They also think, wrongly, that the violence stops at the moment of separation, whereas that's often when it becomes most dangerous.

We have to establish a dialogue between the penal system and the family law system. Family law must acknowledge that the presence of domestic violence is dangerous for both mothers and children, and measures must be put in place. We often hear about joint custody, for example. This is ultimately a situation that very often requires parents to stay in touch for the sake of the children, which increases the number of opportunities for controlling spouses to exercise violence against their former partner or against the children.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I would like to ask Karine the same question, because there was another incident in the mid-nineties, when a father was supposed to have supervised visitation with his children. The reason they separated was that he was very controlling. Not only was there a lack of supervision, but he ended up killing his four children and shooting himself. Before doing that, he burned down the house.

He went through some kind of treatment, but it obviously didn't work. How do we, as a society, protect our children?

The Chair: Anna, unfortunately, your time has been exhausted. Perhaps she can incorporate her answer into somebody else's.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you.

The Chair: Next, we have Pam.

You have six minutes as well.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you.

It's a pleasure to be subbing in on this committee again for such an important study. I commend the members of FEWO for doing this.

Professor Koshan, you mentioned parental alienation. I recently sponsored a petition on this in looking for changes to the Criminal Code, but I wonder if we could talk a bit about parental alienation.

One of the things that came up in my meetings was reunification camps and how these are much like conversion therapy and are being used to send young children to the United States to camps at tens of thousands of dollars of costs to the moms to basically convert them to reunite with an abusive partner.

Do you have any comments on that and whether or not you think the federal government should do something, whether legislatively or through regulations, about these reunification camps?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Thank you very much for that question.

As I think I mentioned in my opening remarks, our research on family law very much supports the recommendations that have been made by the National Association of Women and the Law about the need to limit parental alienation arguments in family law cases, because often they are raised in response to allegations of family violence by women.

You're absolutely right that we sometimes do see judges buying into this notion of parental alienation, when really what a mother is trying to do is protect her children from abuse, and then, in cases that are considered extreme, these reunification camps occur, which are extremely harmful to children.

Yes, I would urge the committee to think about placing limits both on the extent to which these types of arguments can be made in family law proceedings and on the types of remedies that can be ordered. I believe there really do need to be limits placed on these types of reunification so-called therapies.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes. I'm familiar with the NAWL recommendation. I've met with them and am very supportive of what they're looking for.

One thing that the moms and children who have been subjected to these camps said was that if the reunification therapy and reunification camps were ended, it would stop the money train, and it would actually help in judges not recommending.

I know that I'm directing my questions at you, Professor Koshan, because you brought it up, but if LEAF or anyone else wants to jump in, you're more than welcome to.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Maybe I'll briefly make a plug for Linda Neilson's research in this area. She found that sometimes the people who are testifying as experts in parental alienation cases are the same people who run the reunification camps, and they stand to profit directly from those camps.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'll go over to you in just one second, Madam Riendeau, but these camps are for tens of thousands of dollars, and the charge for them is being charged to the moms, who often have to mortgage a house. I mean, we're not talking about small amounts of money that are the costs to try to fix these kids.

Talking to these young people who have been subjected to these camps or therapy...it's absolutely horrible.

Did you want to add to that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Yes, besides prohibiting the camps, every effort must be made to educate the courts and forensic psychology experts: When a woman tries to protect her children, or the children say they don't want to see their father because they've seen or experienced violence, listen to her.

People are starting to talk about judicial violence, which is one of the ways that spouses use to continue controlling their partners. We completely agree with the recommendations that the National Asso-

ciation of Women and the Law has made in favour of prohibiting parental alienation. That concept, which isn't based on science, has unfortunately been adopted by too many family and youth courts. We think it's just a way to maintain the status quo and the power of controlling and violent fathers.

• (1605)

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think there are two issues, though.

One is the NAWL recommendation about banning parental alienation in the law, but there's also getting rid of the reunification therapy. Would you agree with that for the actual therapy in camps? You're nodding your head yes. Okay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Yes.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: One of the issues we have with mandatory training, though, is.... This committee studied Keira's law, thanks to MP Dhillon. I worked on that. We can't mandate training for judges. I'm very grateful that the Province of Ontario has implemented Keira's law, as has Manitoba. I would encourage Quebec to do the same, but we're really limited as legislators in requiring training for judges, and a lot of the people who need training actually fall within provincial jurisdiction—children's aid societies and Crown prosecutors. I think we've come a long way, thanks to MP Dhillon's private member's bill and the work of Jennifer Kagan, but we are limited as educators on training.

I think I have about 15 seconds left, so I'll I'll end it there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Perfect.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thanks to the four witnesses for being with us in the context of this study.

The news, unfortunately, reminds us quite dramatically how much more we should be doing to ensure no one else becomes a victim. An article by Stéphanie Grammond appeared in La Presse this morning, reminding us once again that the numbers in Quebec are alarming. We can come back to that.

Ms. Barrette and Ms. Riendeau, we just discussed the issue of education. I was fortunate to discover your tool last summer, when I was thinking about how to submit this study on coercive control to the committee. Would you please tell us a little more about the subject and precisely how it adds to our study of coercive control?

As we know, that tool isn't a magic wand; it won't solve all problems, but there is a whole continuum of services and solutions that can be proposed. I'm going to give you some time to tell us more about your tool.

Ms. Karine Barrette: Thank you very much for that question.

We've actually been working on the project since October 2021, as my colleague mentioned. We're working with an advisory committee consisting of some 30 members in the whole chain of legal stakeholders: police forces, the École nationale de police du Québec, academic researchers, assistance and housing shelter workers, lawyers, the director of criminal and penal prosecutions, prosecutors and correctional services. We think it's important to work with all those people.

The idea was to develop tools that would really meet the needs of those stakeholders on the ground, first, to understand what coercive control is in their respective missions, and, second, to determine limits on the ground. Then the idea was to see how those stakeholders go about detecting coercive control, since a patrol officer doesn't detect it in the same way as a family lawyer or immigration lawyer. The idea was also to determine how to document coercive control more accurately in order to understand the dangerousness of a domestic violence situation.

So we've developed a tool box and a "police placemat", a checklist for police officers, that indicates how the various coercive control tactics manifest themselves. The members of the advisory committee really wanted to see specific examples. Not having experienced gaslighting situations, they told us they wanted to know what they look like and how to develop surveillance and to question on the ground.

We've designed these tools to support these stakeholders, and, as my colleague mentioned, we've created this "police placemat", which now helps police officers write their reports so they can include details about what they observe on the ground. These are just a few tools among many others, but they're having a major impact. We've also developed other components on women experiencing economic insecurity and women from ethnocultural communities.

• (1610)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: We know we can't even consider helping domestic violence victims escape from that cycle if we don't do more to address economic violence so we can remove women from the poverty and insecurity cycle that very often traps them in the domestic violence cycle in the first place.

I'd like to go back to the somewhat chilling article that appeared this morning. It tells the story of Naima Rezzek, who was stabbed by her former partner last Saturday. She was the second woman killed in three days and the fourteenth woman killed in Quebec since the start of this year. Eight of those women were killed in domestic violence situations. The author of the article asks the ques-

tion, "So what's going on here? In less than five months, more women have already been murdered than in all of 2023."

My thoughts about the coercive control issue stem from the fact that I was challenged on the subject by a female member from Quebec City. You told me you had been consulted about that article. I know that you weren't just consulted about the article, you also contributed to the report entitled "Rebâtir la confiance", which brought together the various initiatives in Quebec. That's more or less what was said in the article.

There are a lot of things that Quebec can do better, but the ball is now in the federal government's court regarding the criminalization of coercive control, and we can't toy with that ball.

How do these figures reflect the situation? How could this tool for detecting coercive control help reduce the number of crimes against women?

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Actually, the reason we welcome the study you're conducting here today is that it's important to talk about this concept and to make it known. Many professionals and victims, although the latter know what they go through, think that domestic violence means physical violence. However, we know that victims experience all kinds of forms of control, and we know that coercive control is a very accurate indicator of lethality. A study conducted in England has shown that, in more than 90% of domestic homicide cases, the victim had previously experienced coercive control.

The public, and professionals especially, must be aware of the concept so they can help victims and urge perpetrators to change their behaviour. In my opinion, here's what it takes to succeed: We have to document situations, name them, take steps to counteract coercive conduct and stop trivializing actions that, in isolation, may indeed seem trivial. People must be more informed, oppose coercive control and recognize it as a form of violence.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Barrette, if you have nothing to add on the subject, I'm going to ask you a question: what did you learn from that tour? You said that every country that had raised the criminalization issue felt there was no turning back.

Ms. Karine Barrette: We agree with what the other witness said: All actors can help with screening. As previously mentioned, where there's no physical violence, victims aren't necessarily aware that they are victims of domestic violence. If we recognize that coercive behaviour goes beyond physical violence, actors in the legal community, in both family and criminal law, will be able to intervene and inform the victims.

[English]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Next, we have Leah Gazan.

You have six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here today for this very important study.

My first question is for Professor Koshan.

Would you recommend to the committee to not criminalize coercive control?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Thank you very much for that question.

That is the position I took with my colleagues in the brief that we filed with the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

We totally understand that coercive control is a real concern and that we need to think about legal responses to coercive control, but we share some of the concerns that were mentioned by Roxana Parsa from LEAF in her opening remarks. We have learned some lessons from things like mandatory charging and prosecution policies for domestic violence.

We also bring to the table some issues with how family law is treating coercive control. It is being used against women. Women's protective actions—

Ms. Leah Gazan: Professor, I'm sorry. It's just because I have limited time.

Do you agree that we should not criminalize coercive control, yes or no?

• (1615)

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I agree with that, but not at this time. We need more work to be done.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay, perfect.

I would like to now go over to you, Madam Parsa.

Would you also agree to not criminalize coercive control?

Ms. Roxana Parsa: Yes, we do agree with that.

We also submitted a brief to the JUST committee that outlines our submissions in more depth.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have another question for you.

You were talking about focusing instead on prevention or ways that people exiting violence can actually do that.

One thing that I put forward, which will be voted on in the fall, is to put in place a guaranteed livable basic income.

Do you agree that we need a guaranteed livable basic income as one way to deal with the gender-based violence crisis?

Ms. Roxana Parsa: I think that absolutely having a basic income, along with having affordable public services, housing and increased social protections would all assist in helping survivors know that they can be safe if they if they need to leave their relationship.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Would you recommend a guaranteed livable basic income in addition to other supports and services meant to meet specific and special needs?

Ms. Roxana Parsa: Yes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay, thank you.

I'll go over to you, Ms. Koshan. Would you also agree?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Yes, for the exact same reasons mentioned by Ms. Parsa, I agree that it's a very important way of ensuring social and economic support.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay, that's wonderful.

Madam Barrette and Madam Riendeau, would you recommend putting in place a guaranteed livable basic income in addition to other supports meant to meet specific and special needs as a key action to deal with gender-based violence and people fleeing coercive control?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Yes, absolutely.

Access to a decent income, safe and affordable social housing and different social policies are essential factors in helping women fleeing violence do so more easily.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

Madam Koshan, you spoke a lot about parental alienation. Do you believe that courts should not be able to use parental alienation as an argument in cases?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Yes, I agree with that. I have a bit of a caveat, if I could take one second to mention it. There needs to be a distinction made between parental alienation allegations made against mothers and what we sometimes see from fathers, which is a real sabotage of children's relationships with their mothers, which itself is a form of family violence, so I think we need to keep a distinction between those two different types of practices. If we can do that, then, yes, I think parental alienation arguments should not be permitted in family courts.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Go ahead, Ms. Parsa.

Ms. Roxana Parsa: At this point, LEAF does not support a full ban on parental alienation, because we need to do some more internal work on establishing our position on this, but we do think that it is certainly extremely important for courts and judges to be educated on the ways in which litigation is used as a form of abuse.

One thing we're afraid of if coercive control becomes a new criminal offence is that it will also be weaponized against women as a form, essentially, of coercive control. We think that it is crucial that courts and members of the legal system are educated and continue to learn about this.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Do you recommend educating courts and others about what parental alienation is?

Ms. Roxana Parsa: Absolutely.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay, that's wonderful.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: Leah, you have four seconds.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Then I'll stop.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Michelle, you have five minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses today here at status of women, a.k.a. FEWO, as we study coercive control.

We've seen a drastic rise in domestic violence. We've heard some wild stories which my colleagues around the table and all the women here today have shared.

I'll start with you, Ms. Koshan. I think it would be beneficial in this report to have a definition, because you've outlined this, of a protective mother. I always, for the record, want to say that this does happen to men. I always want to say this. This can happen any place, but we are focusing on women here. What is the difference between a protective mother versus coercive control? What is the definition? I think the definition is a key part of this conversation.

• (1620)

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Yes, and it's challenging to do in the limited time that we have, but—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: You are very welcome to submit a written reply, because I do understand that this is very big, and it's like, “Oh, in 10 seconds, tell us about it”. I understand that, so if you want to submit a written submission, we'd love to have it as well.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Yes, thank you.

Maybe what I'll do, just to try to put a fine point on it, is say that coercive control, in the way that it's understood as a form of intimate partner violence or family violence, is all about the impact that it has on the autonomy of the victim, so it's a pattern of conduct that has an impact on the autonomy of the victim.

Whereas, if we think about mothers' protective conduct, they are not engaged in that conduct in order to impair the autonomy of fathers; they are trying to protect their children. In part I think that it's the difference in the intent behind the conduct, what they're trying to achieve through the conduct, and I think that there is a real distinction to be drawn between attempting to protect one's children and attempting to control one's partner in a way that impairs their autonomy.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Yes. I think you've pointed out the challenges and complications of this and why it is so important that judges be so critically educated in this. There's a nuance here. For anybody who has had experience in an abusive relationship, sometimes the abuse or the toxic relationship between the intimate partners is vile, but they're able to have relationships with their children, or the children need to see each parent, but the system is set up now so that the children are pawns for money, for all these things.

The cost of living crisis further alienates or forces women into abusive relationships. There are stats now. A National Post article had the headline, “Divorce rates in Canada falling because Canadi-

ans simply can't afford it”. We already know that money is one of the biggest reasons you can't leave a relationship, if they have financial control.

Thank you for the great handouts. They're super helpful in educating the public in terms of the definitions.

Many people don't even know they're in an unhealthy relationship because that's all they've ever known, and the children don't know. We want to intervene and pull that apart and break that pattern, and then you have articles like this saying, “the main reasons wedding bells aren't ringing seems to be the hefty price tag and overall cost of living”, or the inability to afford to leave or to access housing.

I don't know who wants to chime in on that, but I'd love to see something in the report around that. The cost of living is a very big factor in allowing women to break free from abusive relationships.

I see Louise making eye contact, so I'll ask Louise to comment.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Yes, we see that some women seeking assistance from shelters sometimes decide to go back to their violent spouse because they can't find safe and affordable housing where they can continue to feed, dress and raise their children. Those are major challenges. Every day, since the housing crisis got worse in Quebec, we've seen women staying in shelters for longer periods of time. That leads to other problems and prevents more women from accessing those shelters.

Consequently, efforts must absolutely be made to address women's situations and economic self-sufficiency; they must be provided access to jobs that allow them that freedom. Work also has to be done to identify the signs of control, such as spouses who urge women to leave their jobs or deprive them of access to the couple's financial resources. Those are also things that must be detected if we want to help women.

• (1625)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next, I'd like to invite Anita to ask questions.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I would like to thank all of the witnesses. The testimony today has been extremely helpful, not only in discussing how we can remedy this, but also in what exactly it is. I think we've skipped a little in this committee from what coercive control is to what the government can do, to what the justice system can do and how we can educate, but we haven't actually put on the record exactly what it is we're talking about. We've had witnesses here to talk about financial and economic abuse, about physical violence against women, girls, non-binary and gender-diverse people, but what exactly is coercive control?

Before you answer that, specifically right now, to Madam Riendeau and Madam Barrette, you handed out something. I just glanced at it and found it very useful. I hope you will table it so that it becomes part of the official documents of the committee. It talks about monitoring and interrogation, threats, sexual violence, gaslighting, financial abuse, spiritual violence, harassment, humiliation, abuse using technology, blaming, physical violence and isolation. These are things that if you know people who have experienced it, or if you have personally experienced coercive control, you would know instinctively but would not necessarily be able to articulate it or even to describe it, particularly to judges and others.

I'll give you a few minutes to put on the record what exactly we are talking about with coercive control.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Barrette: Coercive control is ultimately a continuum of tactics, strategies and manifestations of violence and exploitation designed to terrorize or dominate the victim and deprive her of her rights. As another witness mentioned, there really is an intention to hide behind that. It's often done gradually and surreptitiously by a partner or former partner. It's also repeated over time.

Once you acquire a clear understanding of coercive control, you won't confuse it with protective behaviour because you see the intention behind it. You don't confuse it with a squabble or dispute. Coercive behaviour sets in over time. It's a process of taking control, not a loss of control, and that control may be exercised in many ways.

We referred to the tool that we use to cite examples, but that's not all there is. A perpetrator of violence will at times use a type of manifestation or tactic, but if that no longer works and the victim wants to take back power, he will unfortunately use another tool in the tool box and, in some instances, resort to physical violence.

A coercive control situation can also arise in a relationship where there's never any physical violence because it won't be necessary. Victims who often find themselves in this kind of situation don't always know they're experiencing coercive control. We've developed a tool for victims, a booklet entitled *Ce n'est pas de l'amour... c'est du contrôle*. Some victims have told us that, when they consulted the resources and came across the words "domestic violence", they skipped over them because their partner had never been violent with them and had never touched them. However, it's a eureka moment when they read our booklet.

Every time we contact the media, print or otherwise, to discuss coercive control, we get calls and emails from people who tell us that's what they're experiencing. They tell us that they thought they

were losing their minds, that their partner had told them they were overreacting, that they were lying or that they had a mental health problem. Their partner told their family that they were too sensitive. Now they realize that this is what they're experiencing and that their partner is spinning a web around them. Since physical violence isn't always in the picture, it's harder for victims to realize the situation they're in.

The more informed legal stakeholders are in this regard, the more they can play a watchdog role and be able to inform victims. Some instances may not even involve a criminal process; it may be an immigration or family law process. It may involve notaries. It's important for everyone to know that. That's how we make people see what was previously invisible; we do it for the victims.

Ms. Louise Riendeau: I would like to add that we wanted to create tools for all legal stakeholders to help them ask the right questions. Those who work in family law must be able to document coercive control. Those who work in immigration law must be able to perceive the specific ways that spouses use to control their vulnerable partners.

[English]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I noted that our other witnesses both talked about education as being very important.

What you're describing talks about intention and a pattern, which doesn't really bode well in terms of the judicial system, the criminal justice system.

I'd like to start with Professor Koshan.

You said that criminalizing is probably not a good idea, but could you talk about the education component?

• (1630)

The Chair: Sadly, Anita, your five minutes are up.

I would welcome that testimony to be added, but perhaps somewhere else in the next round.

Andréanne, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Riendeau and Ms. Barrette, continuing on from what you just said, it's not because there isn't always any violence that it doesn't always hurt, and it's not because the violence comes in the form of coercive control that it can't lead to femicide. I think that's the reason we're so interested in this issue. If you have any comments to make on what I just said, please feel free.

I'd also like to go back to an aspect that hasn't received a lot of attention today, and that is Bill C-332. You discussed it in your preliminary remarks, and you said you were in favour of it.

I recently attended a conference on violence against women. It was held in my region, and the groups in attendance were really interested in the bill. However, some changes should be made to it because, as it's been drafted, it couldn't be used to solve all problems, even those involving coercive control. Do you have any proposals to offer us concerning the bill?

Ms. Karine Barrette: Thank you very much.

I'd like to go back to your first comment: that it's not because there isn't always any violence that it's not dangerous. According to one U.S. statistic, in one third of domestic homicide or attempted domestic homicide cases, there was no history of physical violence.

So when you train police officers, you tell them they don't have to wait for physical violence or assault to occur for there to be a threat. That's a very important factor.

As regards Bill C-332, we're definitely in favour of it. We had a number of recommendations that we wanted to see incorporated in the first draft of the bill. We also had a chance to present those recommendations when we testified before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. The final version of the bill incorporates most of our recommendations. One thing is certain: The bill and the criminalization of coercive behaviour won't be enough. We can't simply criminalize behaviour and hope to solve the problem as if by magic. Essential conditions must be laid down, as we mentioned in our opening remarks.

Ms. Louise Riendeau: I think we definitely have to discuss the training of professionals. There have to be enough resources for them to incorporate this in their new practices. We need to increase public awareness. We have to consider how to prevent the potential adverse effects of putting coercive control in the hands of the courts by discussing the matter with victims and marginalized groups. Consequently, a series of measures must be put in place before the bill comes into force.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we have Leah Gazan.

You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

My questions are for Madam Parsa.

You spoke about systemic oppression and the misapplication of the law. You spoke a little bit about mandatory sentences. I'm trying to figure out how to phrase this. For BIPOC communities, why is the criminalization of coercive control more of an issue?

Ms. Roxana Parsa: I think there are two main reasons that we've raised.

First, if you look at the history of the criminal law and look specifically at something like mandatory charging and domestic violence policies, you'll see that violence and abuse are often treated differently when faced by BIPOC communities. It's not understood the same way by police officers and by members of the legal system. Often this leads to the victim being charged as an aggressor.

Studies have shown that this happens at much higher rates with indigenous and Black women. They are identified and charged as primary aggressors in situations of domestic violence when they were really the survivors there. That is a risk that we really think should be taken seriously with any new criminal offence.

Second, marginalized communities, racialized communities, disabled women and queer communities, all of these groups have valid and historical reasons to distrust the police and the legal system. Relying on the legal system and the criminal justice system as the solution in effect places these people outside of the system and outside of an ability to seek help. People who feel more comfortable going to the legal system and talking to police officers might feel like they can access this criminal law, but many of these communities would not want to seek out—

• (1635)

Ms. Leah Gazan: What would you recommend as the alternative?

Ms. Roxana Parsa: What we would recommend as the alternative is, like I've said, funding for social services and for housing and education. Having education for frontline providers, having education for social service workers—that tool box that was being spoken about—I think is a great idea so that people are aware of coercive control. If these events are being seen, people will understand that this is abuse and that someone might need help.

I think that social services, housing and, as you were saying, basic income should all be prioritized.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Leah.

A few people mentioned—I know Anita did—that the tool kit be tabled. Perhaps we could have the clerk request an electronic copy and then we'll be able to have it.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for their testimony.

We're going to pause for a few minutes. The next panel is all online, so we're going to do a quick change for that, and then we'll get moving.

Thank you.

We will suspend for about four or five minutes.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1645)

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting back to order.

The committee will resume our meeting and the study of coercive behaviour.

We are now with our second panel of witnesses.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name.

Those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone. Please mute your microphone when you are not speaking.

Those in the room, your microphone will be controlled.... There is no one in the room, so we're good.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available. You have the choice of English or French for your earpiece. If interpretation is lost, let me know with a wave of your hand. I'll be watching.

At this point, I would like to welcome our witnesses.

We have Lori Chambers, professor at Lakehead University, as an individual. From the Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuelle, we have Gabrielle Comtois, policy analyst. From YWCA Hamilton, we have Amy Deschamps, director, housing and gender-based violence support services.

You will each have five minutes for opening remarks, followed by rounds of questions.

At this point, I would like to give the floor to Ms. Chambers.

You have five minutes.

Dr. Lori Chambers (Professor, Lakehead University, As an Individual): Thank you.

Coercive control is a very gendered behaviour. It's a starting point. That is something that is too often neglected when we talk about intimate partner violence. It is a range of acts designed deliberately to make a person feel subordinate, dependent, and to isolate them from sources of support and escape from a relationship.

It can include violence, but it doesn't have to. It's extremely difficult for people to recognize from the outside, and sometimes it's difficult for people to recognize for themselves that they're experiencing coercive control.

It is a high-risk situation for fatality when someone is experiencing coercive control. It is much more predictive of femicide than any physical violence that a man can take against his partner.

The tactics of coercive control are quite straightforward when you list them, but they're harder to see. I think the greatest challenge we face is that most people don't really understand it. It is the use of intimidation, isolation, control and deprivation, sexual assault, economic exploitation and legal harassment to strip someone of their autonomy and personhood. It's a fundamental assault on a person's autonomy in all ways.

You're threatened, you're surveyed, you're degraded repeatedly. This may be accompanied by violence at the beginning of a relationship or at any time to confirm control, but after that behaviour, it may just be a threat of further violence and nothing else is ever necessary. It is quite common for people to say, "He didn't hit me, so I don't think I was being abused," but that does not mean that abuse, and actually very dangerous abuse, is not present.

Technology actually feeds into this because GPS systems, small cameras, smart phones, audio and video recorders all make this easier for perpetrators to continue their control even from a great distance, so no matter where you go, he can still find you and he can still harass you.

There's isolation. Their access to their family, friends and other people who are sources of support is often really cut off. Their resources and capacity and abilities are used for the benefit of the perpetrator, not for the person who's being abused. They're deprived of the means of independence, and of even control of their everyday life. They are told what to wear, what to eat, when not to eat, when they can go to the bathroom.

It can be very pervasive, all controlling of every aspect of their life and identity. This means that people gradually lose the ability to make decisions for themselves because they're not allowed to do so, and this makes it difficult to leave.

There's sexual coercion. We don't talk nearly enough about the fact that sexual violence is 100% part of coercive control. Victims who are experiencing coercive control are assaulted. They may not think of it as rape because we don't, as a society, recognize that rape occurs in ongoing long-term relationships. We minimize it. We think of it as people—particularly women—owe sexual performance to their male partners. But if you're asked to do something, or told to do something, or forced to do something, because there will be bad consequences for you if you don't, even if you're not punched as you're raped, it is sexual coercion. Having to do things that are distasteful to you at a time when you don't want to is part of the pattern of coercive control.

There's financial control, economic exploitation, taking out credit cards and loans in your name, leaving you indebted, taking away your ability to work, sabotaging your ability to get to work, to have friends at work, allowing you only a very small amount of money to buy food for the family so that then you're going hungry and you can't save any money whatsoever to do anything independently. There's employment and sabotaging your employment so you can't keep a job, restricting your ability to get an education to improve your situation. All of these are characteristics and facets of control.

If you do manage to leave, there's legal harassment. This is particularly terrifying and terrible when women think they might have escaped, and then the perpetrator does things like stalking and harassment and potential violence and threats and following and being with their kids all the time.

● (1650)

Then with custody agreements, you have to go to court and you're being gaslighted about what you did and what he did.

These patterns are not recognized by police, so if you call for help, it's not seen. If you go to family court, it's not seen.

We know that women and children are dying because of this. We need to have a much better understanding of how these tactics work together and far better training for all the services that are responding. We need more money in women's hands—and housing and options for them—so that they are able to leave.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that. We're all well aware that five minutes go so quickly. I'm sure that on many occasions we would love to have 10 instead.

Just in the interest of time, we will move on to Ms. Comtois.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gabrielle Comtois (Policy Analyst, Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel): For more than 45 years, the Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel has been committed to promoting an exchange of expertise among its members, supporting the search for solutions for putting an end to sexual assault and promoting the development of intersectional feminist intervention services for women in Quebec.

For the Regroupement, coercive control is both an individual and a collective problem that is rooted in unequal relationships. We use the expression “continuum of sexist violence” to designate behaviours intended to control and subordinate women in our society by instruments of domination such as violence and discrimination.

As a national group concerned with sexual violence, we would like to draw the committee's attention to the concept of sexual coercion in particular. According to expert Tanya Palmer, sexual violence, in a coercive control context, can manifest itself as chronic sexual violation, that is to say, the gradual erosion of a victim's sexual autonomy over time. The routine nature of most sexual assaults, such as nocturnal rape, constant touching, denial of intimacy and the fact that only one person dictates whether, when and how sexual relations must take place, degrades the victim's sexual autonomy. In other words, coercive control creates a general climate in which it is impossible to give enthusiastic, free and informed consent to sexual activity because refusal to comply may have consequences, particularly when accompanied by other types of violence, such as physical or psychological violence.

Consequently, we must stop viewing incidents of sexual violence between intimate partners as isolated events and start conceiving them as one of the manifestations on a continuum of tactics employed by the aggressor to trap the victim in a situation of violence.

As regards potential solutions, the Regroupement is particularly concerned about the fact that criminalization is currently the government's main strategy for preventing and correcting coercive control. Criminal justice measures should be only one part of a broader strategy.

As you are no doubt aware, only 5% of sexual crimes are currently reported to police in Canada. We also know that individuals

most exposed to sexual violence, such as indigenous women, Black and racialized women, women with disabilities, persons with insecure immigration status and members of the LGBTQIA+ community, are more likely to have negative interactions with the criminal justice system and are therefore less inclined to turn to it. Considering that, according to the Canadian Women's Foundation, more than 55% of Canada's population doesn't fully understand the concept of consent to sexual activity, we encourage the federal government to focus more on public education and awareness campaigns in order to prevent violence before it occurs.

The organizations combatting sexual violence are on the front lines of the development and promotion of awareness and prevention programs in Canadian communities. However, the demand those organizations are facing only grows from year to year, and the lack of adequate resources directly results in longer waiting times for victims seeking the care they need to begin healing. Consequently, the federal government must ensure that those organizations have adequate resources to do the absolutely vital awareness and prevention work they do in our communities across the country.

Lastly, one of the main factors that keeps women trapped in coercive control dynamics is economic inequalities, as committee members were just discussing. The committee will definitely continue hearing about the economic inequalities issue during its current study. These inequalities still persist today. Economic insecurity often forces women to relocate or to live in dangerous situations in order to have a roof over their heads and to meet their basic needs.

The Regroupement believes it is crucially important to address the economic inequalities issue to enable women to escape their aggressor. We have recently witnessed the implementation of the national action plan to end gender-based violence, which the Regroupement views in a positive light. However, like the Ending Violence Association of Canada, we believe that the action plan leaves the actors in the fight against sexual violence somewhat to their own devices.

• (1655)

We are asking the federal government to make more policy room and grant more resources to community organizations that provide assistance to sexual assault victims and to stop viewing sexual violence and domestic violence as separate phenomena. Instead it should view them as crosscutting issues. Sexual assault is committed between intimate partners, and that expands domestic violence dynamics. These issues are part of a continuum, not two separate problems. We feel we now have a chance to improve the action plan by conferring a more prominent role on stakeholders in the fight against sexual assault.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Deschamps, you have five minutes.

Ms. Amy Deschamps (Director, Housing and Gender Based Violence Support Services, YWCA Hamilton): Thank you, Madam Chair and members, for the invitation to speak before you today on the matter of criminalization of coercive control. I bring my testimony from the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabe people. I'm the director of housing and gender-based violence with YWCA Hamilton and have close to a decade of frontline experience in the VAW sector. As well, I'm a survivor of childhood family violence.

At YWCA Hamilton we have served, across a range of preventative and responsive programs, close to 2,000 individuals over the past year whose lives have been impacted by gender-based violence, and we strive to centre the voices of those with lived and living experience as well as our frontline staff in our work and in our advocacy.

While there are key cross-sectoral responses that acknowledge the role of legislation and enforcement in the work to eradicate gender-based violence, many of the survivors we support, particularly those from marginalized or diverse communities, identify that their experiences within these systems have not led to better outcomes for themselves or their children. These systems have had some but limited success in addressing reoffence through existing means of intervention and monitoring. We know that gender-based violence, as we heard today, is rooted in patriarchy and systemic oppression, and that any law, policy or response is also vulnerable to these failings in its application.

We see this in the rates, as was mentioned by other witnesses, of dual charging and the increased rates of survivors being solely charged with the introduction of mandatory charging. We also see this demonstrated in the higher-than-average rates of gender-based violence that we know exist where perpetrators have access to firearms in their jobs and higher-than-average degrees of authority over communities. To meaningfully address and increase safety for survivors, where strengthening and improving the legal system is critical, I want to echo research-backed and evidence-based steps that we believe should be taken in advance of any introduction of coercive control into the Criminal Code. These are highlighted by many of the previous testimonies that have been given to the committee, such as the powerful testimony by executive director Nneka MacGregor of WomenatthecentrE in 2022, as well as really impor-

tant publications put forward by OAITH and Luke's Place on this topic.

I think, as has been spoken to really significantly already today, about the challenge of accurately capturing the various forms and nuances of—

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Pardon me for interrupting, Ms. Deschamps.

Madam Chair, unless I'm mistaken, there's no interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: Is there no interpretation? Okay. I'll continue to speak and see if Dominique—

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: It's back. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Dominique.

Ms. Deschamps, please continue. I'm sorry to interrupt.

Ms. Amy Deschamps: That's not a problem. Thank you.

With the current system, which does not address appropriately even the most overt and physical forms of violence, I am doubtful that our system as it is has the ability to respond to the complexities of coercive control, which my colleague Lori Chambers spoke to so eloquently. In our current context, proving coercive control can be difficult, as it often relies on patterns of behaviour and psychological manipulation rather than physical evidence, and so the burden of proof sits on the survivor, which often leads to, perhaps, disappointment in the court system and further retraumatization for survivors.

Coercive control also often intersects with other forms of oppression, such as sexism, racism, classism and ableism, and legislation must consider how these intersecting factors affect individuals' experiences and must provide survivors with opportunities to have options for support outside of these systems should they choose not to want to take part in them, for example, looking at transformative restorative approaches. Adequate resources and funding to existing services, such as VAW shelters, to adequately address the safety, housing, cost of living and child care needs of survivors, are far likely better able to achieve the outcomes in providing upstream and preventative responses that we're looking for.

I know all of us here have a shared goal of increasing safety for survivors and holding those who use violence accountable while mitigating the unintended consequences of policy decisions. However, we need to begin by addressing the root inequities present within the existing legal and law enforcement landscape. Addressing these issues in traditional ways, as we have been attempting, but failing, to be quite honest—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Deschamps.

At this point we will move to questions. I want to get as many questions in as we can with respect to our witnesses, so we're going to reduce the first round to five minutes each.

We have Anna for five minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. This is a very important topic.

I'm going to start with Lori Chambers.

Ms. Chambers, give a yes or no answer. Do you agree that coercive control is a gateway to physical violence?

Dr. Lori Chambers: It's the wrong way to conceptualize it—as a gateway. It's—

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I want to go back, because I have limited time.

Dr. Lori Chambers: Violence is just one of the tools in the tool box of a coercive abuser, and they won't necessarily use it. The gateway image is not appropriate.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I have limited time. I'm so sorry, Ms. Chambers.

I want to bring up two cases. One case was in April 1997. A husband killed his four children, including sons who were 15 and 14 years old; daughters who were 12 and 11 years old; and his wife Helen, who was 36 years old. There is also your case from December 2017.

They are 20 years apart, and we have the same situation. These individuals are not being punished. They ignored the courts. They've ignored the restraining orders. The system failed them totally.

How can we protect our mothers, our children and our families? Education is great, but in some instances we have to listen to the children, and we have to listen to the parents, so that we can protect these individuals. Do you agree with that?

• (1705)

Dr. Lori Chambers: I agree we need to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] particularly in the case you highlighted that I talked about in 2017. The judicial system failed. Judges need to understand that this is part of the system. No matter how much you might want to avoid it altogether, you can't necessarily. If you're leaving you have a custody dispute about where your kids are going to be.

People interpreting family law have to be taught about coercive control. Those two little girls would still be alive if the judge had understood coercive control and not missed what were some pretty serious red flags.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Let me ask you something. Twenty years ago this particular individual received counselling, education, the whole nine yards. He had restraining orders. They worked with him, and they finally said that he was okay. They were going to let him see his kids. Guess what? It was all an act.

The reason I know about this case is—

Dr. Lori Chambers: There are some who should never see their kids again.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Exactly.

My point is sometimes we have to take that line to ensure that we protect our kids. Coercive control, if we can't protect the victims—the young children, the parents, the mothers—how can we...?

This man received tons of education. I know the case personally, because I was involved with it. They said that he'd gone through it, the whole bit. Yet 20 years later, here we go again. Nothing has changed—nothing has changed. He should have gone to jail. Do you agree?

Dr. Lori Chambers: I agree, but my primary concern isn't whether the man goes to jail; it's keeping the children safe. Keeping the children safe would involve better understanding at the family court. That is more important. It's a better option for the mother so she can leave the jurisdiction and go with the kids somewhere else where they are safer.

Education is more important than criminalizing the man—

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I understand that. I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I have limited time.

Ms. Chambers, I know this other case that happened in 1997. This man went through extensive education and extensive therapy. It did not work. Sometimes we have to accept the fact that individuals cannot change.

In those particular cases, we not only have to educate the law system, our social workers and the therapists; we also have to make sure that we're listening to the children. Do you agree?

Dr. Lori Chambers: For sure. Those kids were afraid of their dad.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: He let them down.

I think we need to put in place criminalizing coercive control. I believe that's the only way we can protect our children. I'm wondering if you agree with that.

Dr. Lori Chambers: I'm hesitant about criminalization without a whole bunch of backstop stuff.

The Chair: At this point, we are going to have to leave it at that. I'm sorry.

We're going to move on to Lisa Hefpner for five minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): I think it's Emmanuella next. We have two more speakers, right?

The Chair: It's Emmanuella. You're right. Thank you.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you.

I want to begin by thanking all of our witnesses for being with us today. It has been very interesting testimony.

I'm going to start with Ms. Chambers.

I noticed that you did not mention parental alienation in your testimony. I was seeking it out, because I wanted to ask a specific question about it.

A few of our other witnesses in past meetings and even today have mentioned that they don't believe that parental alienation should be used against mothers when it comes to family law. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on this. Also, I want to try to get as full a picture as possible. I know that we have witnesses who work with women who are here, and I definitely want to be able to help women and their children, and I have the safety of women and children at the forefront.

Have there ever been any cases that any witnesses on the panel today have seen where parental alienation is a concern?

Ms. Chambers, I'll let you start with your comments on parental alienation and then I'll hear from the rest of the witnesses.

• (1710)

Dr. Lori Chambers: Parental alienation is bad science. The evidence that was presented is not based on good research. It is not a real problem. It's a problem that is used by coercive men to gaslight and discredit their partners, and it is a big problem that it is taken seriously in the courts. It's a weapon used by abusive men.

I would absolutely not give it any credence whatsoever in the court system. It's bad science, junk science, and courts shouldn't recognize it at all.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Does anyone else want to comment on that?

Ms. Amy Deschamps: I can echo what Lori has shared in that often we see that being used as another form of abuse. We know that children are often used as pawns in the custody and access process, as was spoken to earlier, and that's one of the most powerful weapons of coercive control in the reality that we know. There is no greater fear a mother has than loss of control or the loss of the life of her child. This is often a threat that is made by an abusive partner, so I would have to agree and echo those sentiments, that there is no place for that in the court system.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gabrielle Comtois: I'd like to add that the control an aggressor exercises on a woman's life may begin long before children are conceived. We're talking about reproductive coercion when power is exercised or a domination dynamic exists with regard to the decision whether to have children or to use means of contraception. That's also part of the continuum of violence that women in abusive situations experience.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Thank you for your answers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Comtois, you briefly touched on the importance of educating our children and the general public to a greater degree on the concept of consent.

I'd like to know what you think the Canadian government can do about that.

Ms. Gabrielle Comtois: According to the statistics that we see, 8 out of 10 women know their aggressor, and more than half of sexual assaults occur in private homes. It's a myth, in law and among the general public, that sexual assault is always committed by an unknown person in a dark alley. That's not the case. Most often, it involves people who actually know each other.

Consequently, we think it's essential to conduct public education campaigns in order to stop violence before it occurs. The federal government can take action in this area by conducting advertising campaigns and creating educational videos. The idea is to change the culture that normalizes that behaviour.

The first bulwarks aren't the community organizations; they are friends and family members who can recognize this behaviour on the aggressor's part and ensure that it isn't permitted. They can also reach out to the victim. Community organizations play a major role, but the community is the first bulwark.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Is my time up?

The Chair: I didn't wave for my first 30 seconds, so I think I confused you.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you to the witnesses.

The Chair: Thank you.

Andréanne, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thanks to the witnesses for being with us as part of this important study. In Quebec, at least, we would like coercive control to be criminalized.

Ms. Comtois, you mentioned the national action plan, and you said you lamented the fact that the organizations working in the domestic violence field and those in the sexual violence field operate in separate silos. Would you please tell us more about what should be changed in the national action plan to combat violence against women and about how that might benefit you?

• (1715)

Ms. Gabrielle Comtois: The essential problem is the lack of resources. Year after year since the COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen an increasingly sharp rise in the number of survivors seeking our services. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, we've observed that people wait less and less time to file a complaint and that those who do are increasingly younger. We see that prevention works. The problem is that we're overwhelmed. Our waiting lists are growing longer, and front line workers can't provide adequate services anymore. It's too much. We don't have half the resources we need to operate properly.

The national action plan could provide additional funding to support the mission of these organizations. We currently operate on project funding, and it's good, but every project brings extra responsibilities with it. Since our waiting lists are a year long, we really don't need to be taking on more responsibilities or managing a brand new project. That won't help us meet our existing demand, which keeps on growing.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I don't know if you had a chance to read the article by Stéphanie Grammond that appeared in La Presse this morning. You mentioned rising demand and the lack of resources needed to meet it. In her article, Ms. Grammond laments the fact that, since the start of this year, 14 femicides have been committed in Quebec, more than for all of 2023, and this is only the month of May.

Ms. Grammond has addressed the issue because various groups in Quebec are calling for a bill. However, right now at the federal level, Bill C-332, which the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights has considered, refers precisely to the criminalization of coercive control. Ms. Grammond emphasizes the following with regard to the bill:

But there's no consensus on the issue. Some people argue that the definition of coercive control is vague and that certain acts that fall under that heading are already criminal, such as the act of intimidating people by stalking, threatening and depriving them of their keys and cell phones.

You mentioned in your presentation that some individuals use many tactics and various types of coercion. Do you think there are currently enough measures in the Criminal Code to punish someone who would stalk and threaten individuals and steal their keys and cell phones?

Ms. Gabrielle Comtois: For the moment, the ideal would be for the courts and judges to be able to acknowledge coercive control as a contextual factor. I believe that certain elements are already criminalized in the Canadian Criminal Code. However, further to what some of my peers who have previously appeared before the committee and who are appearing now have said, as well as the experts from the north, I would be very cautious about promoting the criminalization of coercive control. The information we currently have isn't enough to promote such a criminal measure. As I said, coercive control is a continuum. Judges and legal system stakeholders need to know that, understand it and be able to take it into consideration. So I would suggest that it be taken into consideration but not necessarily be set forth in law.

I hope that properly answers your question.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You also mentioned economic inequalities, but my colleague will get back to that in the second

round of questions. What stands out for me, in a nutshell, is that the national action plan should offer you more funding predictability and that the Criminal Code should perhaps provide you with a few more tools to intervene more effectively. Is my understanding correct?

Ms. Gabrielle Comtois: Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you for that.

Next is Leah Gazan.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

My first question is for Madam Deschamps.

You said in your testimony that you were doubtful our systems are capable of criminalizing coercive control, one of the reasons being the burden of proof is left on survivors. Can you expand on that?

Ms. Amy Deschamps: Absolutely. Even just in thinking about where the assessment needs to start in the training of the officers on the ground in assessing the situation, the nuances and the complexities of an individual or survivor trying to explain her stories and the impact of maybe a look or the many instances over a span of time of this type of coercive control that have been played out in her relationship, the individual across from her, the officer taking her statement, needs to have the training in assessment, the ability and the will to carry that forward and to identify that. I think the problem starts there.

• (1720)

Ms. Leah Gazan: How can you criminalize something when there's still not really an understanding of what that looks like by the people who are enforcing the law? That's becoming very clear to me.

You also mentioned something about individuals who have power, such as within their jobs, like access to guns. Can you expand on that? I was interested in it. What do you mean by people who have access to guns? Who is that?

Ms. Amy Deschamps: We've seen recent studies and reports about the rates of perpetrators of violence who are in law enforcement. The rates of that are actually significantly higher than we would see in the general population. There have been several studies done. I think the percentage is 40% of partners of law enforcement officers are at risk versus 10% in the general population, so I think that—

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have limited time, and this is very important.

Ms. Amy Deschamps: Absolutely.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I ask that because I asked it in another meeting, and I am aware of high rates of domestic violence that are perpetrated by police officers who would then be tasked with the responsibility to press charges, but they're also perpetrators of violence. That's a bit of a conflict of interest, in my opinion.

You were talking about investing instead—and we heard this in former testimony—in supports outside of the current system. In my riding, where we have a crisis of gender-based violence, the ground zero for MMIWG, Winnipeg has never had more money invested in policing, and I've never seen in our community the rate of violence increase to the level that it has. At the same time, we've seen decreases in supports.

One thing I've put forward in a bill is to put in place a guaranteed livable basic income, in addition to current and special supports, meant to meet specific and special needs. Would that help with dealing with the frontline crisis of gender-based violence, particularly for individuals trying to flee coercive control? It's a yes or no, because I'm going to ask all of the—

Ms. Amy Deschamps: Yes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Professor Chambers, is that a yes or no?

Dr. Lori Chambers: Absolutely, it would be helpful.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Comtois, do you say yes or no to a guaranteed livable basic income?

Ms. Gabrielle Comtois: It's absolutely essential.

Ms. Leah Gazan: It's absolutely essential. Okay. That's great.

Professor Chambers, you gave a wonderful definition of coercive control. I know that we've been trying to find a definition of coercive control. With your definition of coercive control, would you say it's a fairly new concept?

Dr. Lori Chambers: It's about 20 years old. It started, really, with Evan Stark, and grew out of the power and control wheel from the Duluth model 20 years before that. However, the details have filled in more with time, with more examples coming from real life and with talking to more victims.

One of the things I have sent to the committee is a checklist that we're using now locally. It is really detailed about questions to ask to identify coercive control.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I did see that. Would you say that we need to have more research done before we criminalize coercive control, yes or no? Then my time will be up.

Dr. Lori Chambers: I think the research is there. I think what we need is more education because of the risk of misinterpretation of the law with the current problems that Amy was talking about and the racialized enforcement and—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Chambers.

I would like to get in a second round. We have resources for a little bit longer, and this is powerful testimony, but I am still going to shorten the next round to move us along.

Dominique and Lisa—so Conservatives and Liberals—you'll both have three minutes. This was a Bloc study that was put forward, so I'd like to keep you at two and a half minutes and Leah at two and a half minutes as well. Are we comfortable with that?

Dominique, you have three minutes.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Chambers, thank you for being with us this afternoon. Since I don't have a lot of time, I'll get straight to the point.

Regarding the article that our colleague Ms. LaRouche mentioned, I read it this morning and found the statistics it provides spine-chilling. It also suggests an interesting angle on which I'd like to get your opinion. The article reads as follows: "To take action upstream, Quebec could also draw on Clare's Law, under which it would be possible lift the veil on the past of one's spouse." That British law was enacted following a murder in the United Kingdom.

The article also mentions that staff at shelters in the regions, in particular, have realized that women often fall victim to the same man.

Some Canadian provinces have enacted a version of Clare's Law in order to obtain information on a violent man. That's the case, for example, of Alberta, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador and Saskatchewan. It's not the case of Quebec, however. Have you heard about that, and what you think about it?

[English]

Dr. Lori Chambers: I think it's a great idea. The more information women can have in their hands, the better. There's no downside to being able to get information publicly about someone so that you avoid dating them. It originated in the U.K. with Clare's law. I think every province should have a Clare's law.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I don't know if I actually understood, but earlier one of your colleagues mentioned the profile of a toxic individual who virtually enslaves women. How frequent are these kinds of cases in the general population? Is it 1 in 1 million or 1 in 100,000? Are those cases documented?

[English]

Dr. Lori Chambers: We don't really have a profile in that we don't have a lot of statistics because we don't have the cases before us, except for the ones that go violent. We don't know all the cases that don't ever get litigated. We don't have all that evidence.

If you look at the patterns of who dies, it is overwhelmingly white privileged men who kill their partners, and it is overwhelmingly those same men who then might engage in mass violence. They practise on the women in their lives first.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Wow.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I can't see the chair and so don't know if she's given me the nod. I don't know how much time I have left.

[English]

The Chair: Sadly, Dominique, there's no more time.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I'm done, thank you.

The Chair: Yes, you're done.

[English]

Lisa, you have three minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses who we've had here today. It's been a difficult but very important conversation.

I also have very little time, but I'm going to go to you, Amy, from my beloved local YWCA Hamilton.

Thank you for being here. I really appreciated in your opening statement how you explained how victims can be traumatized by a court process if coercive control is criminalized, because it's not based on evidence that police can clearly find. It would be up to the victim to come up with, and I don't know what kind of proof she'd come up with in a court of law to try to prove that she's been living under coercive control.

If we don't have legislation against coercive control, what do you think is the best way to address it? Is there a way to make the justice system work better with the family law system?

Ms. Amy Deschamps: There absolutely needs to be better integration between the criminal justice and family law systems because we know that these things, particularly where intimate partner violence is considered, cannot be separated. We have to look to the reality that the current system does not work for many of the individuals—women, children and marginalized people—who are experiencing it. If we look to where the challenges are presently and start there, my worry about criminalizing coercive control is we're assuming it's going to be a check mark in addressing this instance and this issue.

There are many other opportunities we can look at to try to make change. We have the 86 recommendations that came out of the Renfrew County inquest, which lay out a road map for us to invest in the types of change needed to make a difference.

I see the criminalization of coercive control as one piece of that puzzle, but there is a lot of work to be done ahead of that in order that the people assessing on the beat can make the right decisions. Our systems need capacity. We need time and resources to invest in training our officers and frontline staff. Our system as it stands, as a VAW sector, is crumbling, under-resourced and over capacity. Looking at the real solutions there is the place to start if we want to make real change.

• (1730)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thank you very much, Amy.

Professor Chambers, I'd like to go back to you.

You said in your opening statement that coercive control is more indicative of femicide than physical violence. Could you explain that to us in further detail, please?

The Chair: You have about 25 seconds. Thank you.

Dr. Lori Chambers: A lot of the time, physical violence is just the result of people getting angry and fighting, but femicide is planned. It's men who are in control, and when they lose that control, rather than lose that control, they kill. It's planned behaviour.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: That was well said. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we have Gabriel Ste-Marie.

You have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Greetings to my colleagues and the witnesses.

Ms. Comtois, in two and a half minutes, I'd like to hear you tell us about the problem of economic violence and resource control. Then, if you have the time, I'd like to hear you discuss the issues involved in preventing and correcting that behaviour.

Ms. Gabrielle Comtois: As I said, friends, family and the community are among the most essential resources. They are the first people who can act and help victims find and access resources. Then there are all the front line organizations, such as the centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel, the CALACS, and the shelters, which can help victims access the resources they need to start their healing journey. Lastly, there are more specialized services, depending on their needs.

However, the women have basic needs. Like any human being, they need a roof over their head, access to health care and access to the labour market, but there are barriers at all levels in many provinces. Quebec is in the midst of a housing crisis, it's hard to access health care, particularly for women, and it's harder for women than men to access the labour market.

An established basic income would enable these women and, more broadly, all victims to escape these situations or at least to tip the odds in their favour and improve their general living conditions. Many women who enter the centres can't start their healing journey because they have to meet more immediate needs, such as feeding themselves and putting a roof over their heads. Only then can they think about healing. Individual journeys definitely differ greatly from person to person, but needs that, in the hierarchy, are quite basic, must be met first. The Canadian government must absolutely address this problem so that these women can meet their basic needs.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Last, we have Leah.

You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

It's very clear to me, listening to the testimony, that we focus on punishment. However, if we're really serious about eradicating gender-based violence, we hear, meeting after meeting, that we need affordable housing with rent geared to income, that we need a national child care program and that we need a guaranteed livable basic income. I think we know the solutions. We just lack the political will sometimes to push them forward.

Professor Chambers, you were talking about the profile of abusers.

I'm wondering if you can expand on that, because we're talking about issues in the criminal justice system, especially for BIPOC folks. I know that in Winnipeg, the last ones, who weren't formally convicted—and a case that's currently happening, serial killers, in fact—were white males. I'm wondering if you can speak further to the profile, knowing that the impact of violence is found in all cultures and groups, but the typical, more prominent profile of somebody....

Go ahead.

• (1735)

Dr. Lori Chambers: The serial killer and mass casualty incident people are overwhelmingly white men with some level of privilege. They're not your most disadvantaged people.

BIPOC people are much more likely to be subject to criminal sanction. White men who practise these behaviours with their inti-

mate partners for years before they engage in serial killing or mass casualty incidents don't get called out, don't get considered to be violent, because they are protected by the system that targets other men, so their partners are at risk when those behaviours are missed.

Ms. Leah Gazan: This is concerning for me, because I do know that we have systemic racism.

Dr. Lori Chambers: Yes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: It's predominant, which is why I am concerned about criminalizing coercive control. If you look at profiles of abusers, you see that they have historically been protected by systems.

Would you agree with that?

Dr. Lori Chambers: Yes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Leah.

That will conclude our second panel.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of the witnesses for appearing and providing their testimonies.

I would remind all members that we will start studying version one of the report on the red dress alert, which will be distributed to everyone today.

Other than that, is the committee in agreement to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>