



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 120

Wednesday, September 18, 2024

Chair: Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman



Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Wednesday, September 18, 2024

• (1630)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 120 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Before we begin, I would like to ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters.

I'd also like to remind all members of the following points. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or on Zoom.

Before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge that we have Madeleine back in the room. We didn't appropriately say goodbye to Madeleine when she moved on to another committee.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): She's gone to official languages.

The Chair: Thank you, Madeleine. You were fantastic in welcoming me and then guiding me through my first little while as chair.

Now we welcome Tina. Welcome aboard. I think we're in good hands, so thank you very much.

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

I have a trigger warning before we welcome our witnesses. 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 witnesses and members of Parliament, it is important to recognize that these are very difficult discussions, so let's try to be as compassionate as we can in our conversations.

At this point, it's my pleasure to introduce our witnesses.

In the room, from the Coalition of Families Victims of Post-Separation Abuse, we have Julie Rioux. Thank you.

Joining us by video conference from Little Warriors, we also have Wanda Polzin-Holman, clinical director.

From the Safe Centre of Peel, we have Shelina Jeshani, director of strategic partnerships and collaboration, also joining us by video conference.

From the Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, we have Carla Neto, executive director, joining us by video conference.

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

Ms. Rioux, we will begin with you. We'll allow five minutes for your comments. Thank you.

Ms. Julie Rioux (Coalition of Families Victims of Post-Separation Abuse): Good afternoon.

The Coalition of Families Victims of Post-Separation Abuse is composed of survivors, along with allies such as lawyers, medical professionals and mental health professionals. Our mission is to give survivors a voice, as we felt unheard.

Today we want Canadians and this committee to know that leaving does not stop the abuse. In fact, it often escalates it. Coercive control is the gateway to domestic abuse, post-separation abuse, parental alienation allegations and legal abuse, and at times it ends in femicide and filicide.

Our social and judicial professionals and institutions are often leveraged by abusers to continue to perpetuate abuse. At times, these professionals are complicit.

Femicide occurs every two and a half days in Canada, and 62% of perpetrators were either a current or former partner.

• (1635)

[Translation]

In the name of youth protection and judicial independence, the Charter rights of families are violated.

[English]

I'd like to start with an example in Atlantic Canada.

A father has been convicted of raping the mother. Child protective services confirmed the abuse of all four children by the father. Child protection services removed its supervision services, resulting in the father's criminal undertakings being modified. However, supervision remained at the mother's request, despite pressure from the family court.

Meanwhile, the perpetrator is requesting spousal support and fifty-fifty parenting time at the family court trial, and he will likely be incarcerated at the time of trial.

The victim, a health professional who regularly sees victims of domestic violence, worries about recommending that women leave an abuse situation, as she is cognizant that leaving the relationship to protect herself means she may not be able to protect her children.

In Quebec, the *programme sociojudiciaire* is co-authored and managed by the Quebec youth court judges and the DPJ. It states that protective parents, usually the mothers, exhibit alienating behaviours since they often have a personality disorder or mental health problems. This same document states that alienation is a type of psychological abuse, which they refer to as

[*Translation*]

a “severe separation conflict” or a “loyalty conflict.”

[*English*]

Thus, survivors are faced with systemic discrimination and with judicial bias about mental health. For example, a father is charged with four counts of aggravated assault and two counts of sexual assault. The mother loses custody as she is seen as attacking the father and is labelled as “alienating” due to the children disclosing the abuse to police. A five-day criminal trial occurs. In case of conviction, the DPJ is planning an alternative placement as the mother is unsuitable as she continues to maintain that the father is dangerous.

Let's be clear: These “attacks” they're speaking about are the mother going to police and testifying in criminal court. Cases like this are rampant. They are further complicated as they are seized by Quebec youth court, and the Quebec Court of Appeal does not hear appeals from parents. Children placed in youth centres, whose intent is to improve their lives, are routinely confined to cell-like concrete isolation rooms and abused by staff. When girls run away, they are strip-searched upon their return. Our children are not convicted felons, yet they are being treated as such.

In Ontario, a mom discovered evidence that her teen son was being sex trafficked in foster care. She brought the evidence to police and CAS. In retaliation, CAS accused the mom of sex trafficking her younger children and cut off her parenting time, yet the police laid charges and convicted the person of drugging and assaulting her son. This mom has video evidence of fentanyl on the table, with dad with the kids nearby, and dad's girlfriend shooting up, along with countless videos taken by concerned neighbours.

Also in Ontario, there is an issue with Superior Court judges, as they are routinely ordering custody reversals due to alienation allegations, and ordering reunification therapy without consent and reunification camps. The camps occur in Ontario, but children are also sent to the U.S.A. This violates charter rights and the Canada

Health Act as they pertain to consent to medical treatment and the child's right to have a say, as per the UN declaration of rights.

In western Canada, a father maintained fifty-fifty custody after being charged with assault. He had strangled the mother while the baby was in her arms. He pleaded to a lesser charge. He continues to have unsupervised access and has continued his teaching career.

Clearly, courts are not prioritizing the child's or the mother's right to safety under section 7 of the charter.

In conclusion, many women feel they will only be free once murdered by their abuser. The voices of too many children are being silenced by death. Despite jurisdictional challenges, we implore the House of Commons and the government to make legislative changes to prioritize children and victim safety, along with stronger implementation of the charter.

Thank you.

The Chair: You were right on five minutes. Thank you kindly for your testimony.

Next, I welcome Ms. Polzin-Holman. You have five minutes.

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman (Clinical Director, Little Warriors): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is Dr. Wanda Polzin-Holman, and I'm the clinical director at Little Warriors. On behalf of the vulnerable children and caregivers we work with, I want to thank the committee for providing the opportunity to participate in this important study. Within my testimony today, I will focus on Little Warriors' perspectives and on the problem of coercive control, the need for reforms and ways to better protect survivors.

Little Warriors is a not-for-profit national charitable organization focused on the awareness, prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse. Since 2008, our team at our centre outside Sherwood Park, Alberta, has created programs that have transformed the lives of thousands of children, adolescents and families from across Canada who have experienced child sexual abuse.

Little Warriors' evidence-based, trauma-informed treatment program at the Be Brave Ranch is the only program of its kind to offer intensive, specialized, multimodal treatment to children between the ages of 8 to 17 who have been sexually abused and are survivors, as well as their caregivers. As the needs in this area of child sexual abuse unfortunately continue to grow, we also have an evidence-based educational workshop, Prevent It!, that was created in conjunction with researchers at the University of Alberta with the aim to teach adults about child sexual abuse.

We continue to research areas of mental health, trauma treatment, addiction and adverse childhood experiences as these issues relate to child sexual abuse. At Little Warriors, we work with various stakeholders as well as a scientific and clinical council to ensure healthy outcomes for the children and families with whom we work.

We consistently demonstrate high, reliable change and recovery rates, highlighted by our ongoing third party independent outcome measurements. Research relating to our programs demonstrates a social return of an investment of 11:1 as this crosses systems of child and family services, education, health, crisis prevention and criminal justice. Research highlights that upwards of one in four girls and one in six boys experience an unwanted sexual act before they turn 18, and recent reports indicate that over the past five years, online sexual luring of Canadian children is up 815%.

We define issues around coercion in the context of child sexual abuse, obviously highlighting that children cannot provide consent for any type of online or in-person sexual abuse.

Coercion occurs when children are encouraged or manipulated and forced to do something for sexual access. Of note, this coercion occurs in the hands of adults as well as other children and youth at times. At Little Warriors, we unfortunately see children who've been harmed through intrusive, exploitative and traumatic sexual activities. We see this in various forms, including online, where there is a lack of clear controls and where sites encourage children to become involved with potential offenders and perpetrators. This happens in person as well; research shows that 90%-plus of the time, their offender is someone who is well-known to them.

Some recommendations that we would like to have considered are barrier-free supports across the continuum of care for children who have been sexually abused. Ironically, clinical supports are sometimes more easily accessed for offenders than for survivors.

A second recommendation is revisiting laws that continue to protect offenders, such as non-disclosure agreements and minimal sentencing. Short sentences without accountability often allow for re-offending, and data shows that approximately 29% of child sexual abuse offenders are reconvicted of a new offence in adult court within five years of their original conviction.

As well, we recommend laws that require accountability for social media and online predatory websites.

Fourth is an increased earlier intervention relating to awareness of child sexual abuse and coercion as well as human trafficking of children and youth. More awareness and support are needed for marginalized individuals and communities where there are higher percentages of people impacted.

Fifth is for the government and parliamentarians to ensure that survivors of coercion have full access to support through victim services programs. This can be done by making it easier for individuals to donate to charitable organizations and by providing financial support to organizations—like Little Warriors—that invest in prevention efforts and work with survivors of coercive abuse.

• (1640)

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions, and I look forward to working with all of you to address these concerns.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Polzin-Holman.

Next, I welcome Ms. Shelina Jeshani for five minutes.

Ms. Shelina Jeshani (Director, Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration, Safe Centre of Peel): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I would like to convey my gratitude to the standing committee for this invitation and to the survivors who have shared their stories courageously in the hope of creating a safer country for all girls and women.

We know the data on the prevalence of intimate partner violence in our country is overwhelming. We know this is a phenomenon that is under-reported. The number of victims is far greater than we know, especially those who experience coercive control.

My name is Shelina Jeshani and I am the director of the Safe Centre of Peel, which is located in the region of Peel in Ontario. The Safe Centre is an innovative, evidence-based and best-practice model of how a community can work together to respond and provide a safety net for victims of IPV. The centre has been in operation since 2011 because of the commitment of 24 community partners, led by Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin. Together they provide an integrated and coordinated service delivery model.

In 2008, our community partners began discussing how we needed to respond differently to IPV in our community. We couldn't continue to work in silos, duplicate services and watch while vulnerable women, with their children, tried to navigate systems we had created. Survivors told us they did not want to have to repeat their stories over and over. They did not want to be told they couldn't bring their children with them to these different services. They often gave up trying to travel from place to place and navigate a complex system they didn't understand. They didn't know where to go for help and what was available for them. We were losing our early intervention opportunities. We heard that it was particularly difficult for victims who didn't speak the language, were new Canadians, had low to no finances, had young children, and had virtually no support system. The Safe Centre of Peel recognizes that cross-sectoral collaboration among human services is vital in responding to victims and survivors of IPV.

We see survivors coming forward with various experiences of abuse and violence. One of the most subtle forms we see is coercive control. This is behaviour that attempts to dominate, intimidate and isolate victims. It involves psychological, emotional and financial manipulation. This can play out as constant tracking and surveillance, threats, isolating victims from their friends and family, and controlling finances and resources. It can be masked by comments such as, “I don't want to share you with anyone else” or, “I will manage the money and let you know how much you can spend.”

At first, the various attempts to maintain control are disguised by the perpetrator's perceived overwhelming worry and concern for the victim, or by their increased dependency on having their emotional needs met by the victim. We hear women sharing how signs of coercive control sometimes began subtly in the early part of their relationship, where he would start exhibiting jealousy and having an over-dependence on the victim to cater to his emotional needs, therefore slowly beginning to isolate and control her.

We know that forms of coercive control increase as the perpetrator feels less and less in control. Research shows that when there is coercive control in relationships, there is a high risk of it escalating to physical violence, including severe assaults and even homicide. For many victims, coercive control creates an environment of fear and entrapment that can quickly deteriorate into more overt forms of abuse.

The effects of coercive control are profound, causing psychological trauma, loss of autonomy and long-term mental health issues for survivors. We cannot forget the impact that living in a home with this type of control and abuse has on children and youth.

The following are some of our recommendations.

There is a need for public awareness campaigns to educate Canadians about coercive control and its impacts. The goal should be to raise awareness to support early intervention and prevention.

Invest in specialized services for victims of coercive control, including access to legal support, safe housing, trauma-informed counselling and financial assistance.

Integrated hubs like the Safe Centre of Peel that have a number of sectors working together should be adequately resourced to support the unique needs of victims experiencing non-physical forms of abuse, in order to provide early intervention support.

Law enforcement and justice need more training on understanding the holistic nature of the dynamics of IPV, which includes coercive control.

● (1645)

Finally, further research and more data on the prevalence of coercive control and effectiveness of various interventions are needed.

In conclusion, recognizing coercive control early and intervening effectively is crucial to preventing potential escalation to physical violence, thereby saving lives. This is where we need the strategy and the investment.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the work of the Safe Centre of Peel and for your commitment to address gender-based violence.

I will be happy to take any questions.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jeshani.

For the last witness testimony, we welcome Ms. Carla Neto. You have five minutes as well.

Ms. Carla Neto (Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Carla Neto. I appear before this committee representing Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, a feminist multiservice organization serving victims and survivors of gender-based violence and their children since 1978.

We operate in two distinct service locations: a 25-bed emergency shelter for women and children escaping violence and an outreach centre that works with impacted women, many of whom are still living with abusive partners.

It would be remiss of me if I didn't mention that in recent years we have seen an increase in women escaping intimate partner violence as well as human trafficking. Both locations support women to assess risk, develop safety plans, and offer trauma-informed crisis and ongoing counselling, referrals and advocacy to essential services, such as housing, health care, legal services, and parenting programs, as well as prevention and leadership programming for boys and girls.

We thank you for inviting us to appear as part of this panel of witnesses. We commend you on your efforts to further study this matter of coercive behaviour.

Historically, much emphasis has been placed on physically aggressive acts in intimate partner violence. In doing so, we lack the broader context of relationships and miss the opportunity to see the role and impact of non-physical violence. Although we can't say that coercive control and behaviour will always eventually result in physical abuse, it is fair to say that in our experience in working with victims and survivors of abuse, all physical abuse was preceded by and will continue to include coercive behaviour.

Coercive behaviour occurs within the context of complex dynamics in intimate partner relationships when one partner exerts power and control over the other. Coercive behaviour is action taken to force, manipulate or intimidate someone into doing something against their will. It is harder to identify by family and friends, and it involves the use of threats, pressure and force to control another person's actions. Unlike overt physical violence, coercive behaviour can be subtle and often involves emotional, psychological or social manipulation. That is the reason we often regard coercive controlling behaviour as being invisible chains that restrain victims of both intimate partner violence and human trafficking.

Some victims and survivors of coercive controlling behaviour describe their experiences as living under a constant, never-ending threat. Others describe feeling like captives trapped in plain sight. Those of us who are survivors of war recognize some of the same psychological effects and impacts in the victims and survivors of coercive controlling behaviour.

Coercive controlling behaviour in intimate partner violence has two main components: the coercion and the control. Coercion can be the use of force or threats of physical aggression to alter the victim's behaviour. Control is used to compel obedience by the victim by monopolizing vital resources, dictating preferred choices, limiting options and depriving the victim of essential supports needed to exercise a level of independence. Some of the examples include threats of intimidation, isolation, manipulation, monitoring, surveillance, control of finances and emotional abuse.

Coercive behaviour is often used in abusive relationships, workplaces and other power dynamics where the goal is to dominate and reduce the victim's autonomy.

Finally, we assert that strategies and efforts to address coercive behaviour require a comprehensive multi-level approach that involves various stakeholders, including individuals, institutions and communities. These would include legal protections and enforcement, whereby governments and lawmakers create and strengthen laws to criminalize coercive behaviour; education and public awareness campaigns; supports for non-profit organizations and NGOs; and schools and educational institutions where students can be taught about healthy relationships.

There should also be meaningful funding for services supporting victims and survivors; training for professionals; perpetrator rehabilitation and accountability mechanisms; financial support for victims and survivors; empowerment of communities like religious leaders, friends, families and neighbours; and developing technology and digital solutions that keep victims protected from surveillance, tracking and harassment.

• (1655)

It involves promoting research and developing policy on coercive behaviour to understand its effects and develop evidence-based interventions.

Once again, I express our thanks and appreciation for your invitation to participate in this very important conversation.

I too am available to answer questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Ms. Neto.

Thank you all for your opening remarks.

We will now move to our first round of questions. I will begin with Dominique.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vien, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Colleagues, it's good to see you again after the summer break.

It's always chilling information. The news is also catching up to us when it comes to violence against women. I took personal notes on the subject. In the last 10 years, violent crime has gone up; sexual assault has gone up; murders have gone up; violent gun crime has gone up. In addition, the number of murders linked to street gangs has exploded. We live in a world where violence is absolutely extraordinary, in the sense that it is beyond comprehension.

Ms. Rioux, since the committee began this study, I find myself somewhat stunned by examples we hear of women—it quite often concerns women—who are victims of violence. Even when they have evidence, videos and witnesses, at the end of the day, they are the ones who bear the blame and are accused of being responsible for these situations.

You mentioned that the courts of appeal are rejecting appeals from lower courts. There is an ignorance or lack of recognition of what is happening in women's lives. We don't understand the problems. Ultimately, women are simply not believed.

How do you explain that? Which of the legislative changes you mentioned should be put forward?

Ms. Julie Rioux: That question contains several others.

With respect to legislative changes, there should be an in-depth review of judicial independence in comparison with Charter rights. Faced with a case, judges often use their judicial independence to make decisions that they believe are in the best interests of the child, even if it puts the woman or children at risk.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Could you give us an example of what you're trying to illustrate?

Ms. Julie Rioux: For example, a woman may have obtained a protection order from a criminal court. A criminal court judge might conclude that there is sufficient evidence to say that this woman's attacker cannot come into contact with her or her children. However, a Youth Division judge or a provincial Superior Court can lift that order to facilitate access rights. So, in order to avoid requiring the use of services to supervise access rights and transfers, the condition prohibiting the aggressor from approaching the victim will be removed, but only for the right of access. Even if there was a protection order for the children, it will be removed to facilitate access rights. In some cases, it might be concluded that access rights were complicated by applying for a protection order, and then the father will be granted 50% custody.

• (1700)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: That is unbelievable!

Ms. Julie Rioux: Yes, it's incredible. Our lawyers tell us not to ask for a protection order.

As for the higher courts, you alluded to the Court of Quebec, but it's the *Chambre de la jeunesse*, the youth division. The judges insinuated that part of the socio-judicial intervention program for severe separation conflicts was to refer the case to the youth division. The Quebec Superior Court can no longer apply the Divorce Act because there are protection proceedings under the Youth Protection Act. The judges say it's an exceptional law that takes precedence over everything else. The criminal court is supposed to enforce the charter, but doesn't give it priority. As for the Quebec Court of Appeal, in 2023, it accepted no appeals from parents regarding a decision by the youth division.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Ms. Rioux, you alluded to parental alienation. I can see that there's a little bit of that too in what you're raising. We heard testimony on this issue here, which was quite disturbing.

Are you in direct contact with some of the cases?

Ms. Julie Rioux: In all the cases I've mentioned, except for the example of the youth centres, I have direct contact with the victims. In fact, I asked their permission to present their cases. As for my contacts with youth centres, they were made through an ally.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: How could we solve the problem of parental alienation?

Ms. Julie Rioux: In my opinion, we should first look at Reem Alsalem's recommendations mentioned in a UN report, and implement them. Then, we'd have to improve the way we select the people who testify as court experts...

Is my time up?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: You see how it sneaks up on you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Welcome, Sonia. You have six minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for your important testimony.

This is a very important subject. Today we are discussing coercive behaviour against survivors. I want to thank all of you for the work you're doing on the ground.

I'm from Peel and, Ms. Jeshani, I say thank you. You are leading that team, and the work you are doing.... This is not the first time you're here, Ms. Jeshani. I know that in 2022 we invited you to provide testimony on intimate partner and domestic violence in Canada. In 2023 we all visited your centre during another study, a study on human trafficking. You talked about isolating the victim and controlling finances, and your organizations are giving support to women in Peel, with multiple services under one roof.

Can you talk about how you, with these multiple services, are helping women? How are you helping survivors with trauma-informed support?

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: Thank you, Sonia. It's nice to see you again as well.

The Safe Centre of Peel works on those principles of trauma-informed care. We listened to survivors who told us that they didn't know how to navigate systems, and so we took over the responsibility of navigating those systems. Survivors tell us they don't want to repeat their story over and over again and that they need someone to hold their hand through this journey—not just at the crisis stage, but throughout the journey—and so our partnership and collaboration really works from those principles of providing that integrated care so that we have a diverse number of partners that provide culturally sensitive care, and language capacity if needed, so that people who come into our centre go through one intake. They tell their story once. We're all trained in the same area of risk assessment, so we're all speaking the same language of risk.

We also know that when people come to us, they may be coming for a lot of different reasons and needs, but it gives us an opportunity to introduce other services and supports that are available and that they may not have even known about. This is the early intervention opportunity to start to dismantle some of the things they're facing. Especially for women who have been living with coercive control, when there's been a loss of self-esteem and an increase of mental distress, it's helping women understand that this is not in their head; it is actually happening to them, and deliberately, intentionally happening to them.

Through these partnerships we're able to come together, have a case conference, wrap around and really be more upstream in some of our work so that we can provide that early intervention opportunity before things escalate even further.

• (1705)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

You talked about public awareness. What kinds of resources need to be used to help with public awareness, and at what age would you recommend it be included in the school system? Can you please elaborate on that further?

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: Yes, absolutely.

Public awareness is key. It means having messages out there in terms of what coercive control is, what it looks like and what supports are available to help people through that.

We have very much identified in society what physical violence looks like, the various different forms of physical violence, but we don't talk about coercive control. We don't talk about coercive control to our youth as they're entering into and putting their feet into relationships. We're not trying to help them define what is healthy. When your boyfriend is tracking you and saying he just wants to make sure you're safe, what's the impact of that? What behaviour is happening, and how is your autonomy being impacted by that? Those are some of those early stages.

We also know that children and youth grow up in homes where there is violence and coercive violence. These are learned behaviours. If we don't have the opportunity to interrupt that, if we don't have the opportunity to teach boys from an early age about power balance in relationships, about the way we treat each other, about how we ask for what we need and how we respect each other in relationships, we go back to what we've seen. We go back to what we've learned.

We know that there are many things that influence unhealthy relationships outside the home as well. There is an early opportunity to address that. Many of our partners here in Peel region are part of our child witness program, which is called The HEAL Network. We work with kids right in the school system. We partner with our education partners in how we can do this and how we can get in there earlier.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: How much time is remaining?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Is there anything else you want to say, Ms. Jeshani?

The Chair: I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

The Chair: Andr anne is next.

[Translation]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank our four witnesses for being here.

This study is troubling, as I see at every meeting we hold on the subject. Current events regularly remind us how important our study on coercive control is.

Why, last May, had there already been more femicides in 2024 than in the whole of 2023, in Quebec?

The first femicide took place in the region I represent as MP. On August 31, I offered my condolences to the family at a golf tournament. The family had been offered a golf tournament to benefit the Maison Alice-Desmarais, located in the riding of Shefford, more precisely in Granby. The Maison Alice-Desmarais helps women who are victims of violence. It was very moving to meet the family of the victim, this young woman from my riding who was killed.

Next Friday evening, at the invitation of the Maison Alice-Desmarais, but, above all, of women's groups, I will be taking part in a march. It's 2024 and we're still obliged to hold activities like this to highlight the fact that women are being killed and that there's still far too much violence against women.

I'll stop here, but I could talk about this for a very long time. I have many questions for the witnesses.

Ms. Jeshani, in your opening remarks, you mentioned that we need to recognize coercive control. Where does that start? What exactly do you mean by "recognize coercive control"? Are you aiming for recognition on the criminal side, so that the system includes more tools for intervention?

• (1710)

[English]

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: When I say that, I'm referring to raising the awareness of what coercive control is and what it looks like.

We need to really invest in being able to name those behaviours, as well as naming the impact coercive control can have on women. We know there are many women who do not come forward because they say, "He didn't hit me" or "He didn't push me," yet in these conditions that they're living under, they feel that they don't have autonomy, they don't have any power, their self esteem has been impacted and they feel they can't even manage because they continue to be humiliated and told they don't have the right or the intellect to lead certain parts of their lives.

That kind of coercive control is long term and damaging to their psychological well-being, and we need to be able to talk about this. We know that coercive control, however it looks, is usually the foundation before we start to see physical violence, including even extreme forms of physical violence like strangulation, which is also on the rise in our country.

In Peel Region right now, which includes Brampton and Mississauga, we see one strangulation per day. That is what is reported to police, and we know that not all women go to police.

We also know the Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention tells us the statistic is that a woman is 750% more likely to be killed by that man who attempts to strangle her, and the strangulation isn't the first step: The first steps are the coercive control tactics, and once that person feels they are not effective anymore, you see the physical violence coming into the situation.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much for these explanations, but the difficulty lies in raising public awareness and recognizing the situation. Obviously, this has to be part of everything we do in terms of education, right up to being able to intervene. The whole system needs to be reviewed, upstream to downstream. However, if victims don't denounce their aggressors, it's because coercive control has not yet been recognized as a criminal offence. At least, that's what I'm hearing in the field. I say this because, again this summer, I met with elected officials. I met elected officials from all parties. I met some of them from the Liberal Party of Canada at the Pride Parade in Montreal, and they told me that recognizing coercive criminal control would be extremely important to provide legal tools and the means to intervene. This is one of the recommendations of the "Rebuilding Trust" report, which was tabled in Quebec City and prepared in a non-partisan way. I'd also like to say that all the political parties in Quebec's National Assembly have asked me to include this recognition in the criminal plan.

I have 30 seconds left. Perhaps you can continue to answer during my next round of questions, Ms. Neto, but you yourself mentioned the question of legal protection. In your opinion, by what means can this be achieved?

[English]

Ms. Carla Neto: Before legal protections, to add to what Shelina has mentioned, it's the recognition that it exists. If the police are not trained in recognizing coercive control, they won't proceed in ways that will protect the victim and the survivor, so when we get to our court systems, if the courts don't recognize coercive control, then there is no legal protection.

That's why I'd like to take a step back. In fact, I think what we need to do is a mind shift in this country. We need to recognize that violence against women exists.

For example, when a police officer comes to an incident of domestic violence, it is important that the woman be believed. If an officer comes in and the perpetrator—or the husband, in this case—says, "Oh, she's not doing well", "She's crazy" or "She has a mental health issue", and the police officer is okay with that and does not proceed, we won't have legal protection, because that police officer won't act quickly. That's the issue.

• (1715)

The Chair: I'm going to have to stop you right there.

Ms. Carla Neto: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Neto.

Next I'd like to welcome Leah Gazan. You have six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and I'll make sure not to see your new 30-second sign.

I'd just like to thank all the witnesses so much for being here today and for the critical work that you're doing.

I have a question for Madam Polzin-Holman.

You spoke a lot about child sexual abuse. I was a teacher for a long time, and one of the things I taught in school was sexual edu-

cation. I don't know if you agree with me, but why is sexual education important in protecting children from child sexual abuse?

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: I think it's a really important question, and I agree that it is important to have sexual education taught to children.

One of the pieces that I think is really important is to look at the age at which we're starting to teach aspects of sexual education and wellness. I know that one of the other panellists was talking about providing this to children and teens when they're in junior high school or high school. I actually think it's very important to talk about sexual education and wellness at an even earlier age, for a few reasons, including to ensure that children at a very young age understand bodily autonomy.

Still, within many of our families and communities there are not the connections around telling a child to go give grandpa a hug. It's sort of forced upon a child. It's also important to give children the proper language about their body so that they can identify when abuses are taking place. Often children giving testimony don't have the right language to talk about their body and what has happened in a situation of child sexual abuse, and that creates a lack of clarity for the justice system to be able to make decisions.

I would say that it's incredibly important to do this within schools, but also to support families so that they have the right language and to support caregivers across communities so they are able to do that.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

I have a limited amount of time, and we have just the most fabulous witnesses here.

You spoke also about the offender often being known to the victim. The reason that really stuck out for me is that I know from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls that it was often common for the victim to know the perpetrator, and in some situations they were forced to stay with the perpetrator. An example would be kids who are exiting out of care or being sex trafficked out of the child welfare system.

Why is it important for us to redefine stereotypes around perpetrators, stereotypes like it's the stranger in the dark?

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: Yes, there is a myth out there around stranger danger. Research shows that most abuse and most child sexual abuse is committed—90%-plus of the time—by someone who is well known to them and/or someone who should be in a position to protect them.

• (1720)

Ms. Leah Gazan: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Super.

My next question is for you, Madam Rioux.

You put forward a petition that called for the recognition of parental alienation. This is interesting, because one of the areas of concern around implementing legislation around coercive control is that there still isn't enough understanding about parental alienation and how parental alienation is sometimes used against the parent who for very good reasons has concerns about the other parent.

Very quickly, your petition acknowledges the injustice and human rights violations currently facilitated in Canada's family courts, recognizing the court itself is complicit in its continued abuse of women and children. Can you expand a little bit about that, about parental alienation and the danger?

Ms. Julie Rioux: Just to be clear, we want it banned, right?

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes.

Ms. Julie Rioux: It's a trump card. If you go into court and you start talking about domestic violence and the danger the children are in, they say, "Oh, she's alienating", so it's also that you're under a microscope, a magnifying glass, as a mom. If I do A, it's good for my child; if I do B, they're going to say I'm alienating.

Ms. Leah Gazan: For example, if there was a father who wasn't well, you might say, "You know what? He's not well. We want him to have a relationship and to make sure it's safe, but I don't think he should have full access, for good reason."

Is that an argument often used in those cases?

Ms. Julie Rioux: It's often used in a—

The Chair: If you could comment....

I'm sorry.

Ms. Julie Rioux: It's all right.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to allow a few seconds to wrap up that question, and then we'll move on to the next.

Ms. Julie Rioux: As soon as it's used, the conversation about the risk posed by the other parent ends.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay, Anna, you have five minutes.

We're beginning our second round.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

I'm not going to sit here and say that I'm not disappointed. I'm actually very disgusted.

I'm going to bring up two situations. In 1997, there was a killing of four children and their mother. The father shot them all, then shot himself. Before he did that, he set the house on fire.

In 2020, Kari's law was killed.

The reason I'm bringing both cases up is that they're so far apart. It doesn't seem like anything has changed in this country. Children are not being listened to. I'm very disgusted by this fact.

I think that, one, the judges are not listening to the children and, two, we are failing the system, as women, by not listening to them. More importantly, how many of these criminals—I call them criminals because they're abusing our children and women—are out on bail right now while women are running scared?

Anyone can answer that question.

Does anyone have the answer?

Go ahead, Julie.

Ms. Julie Rioux: I don't know how many, but most are.... I don't know of a victim when they weren't out on bail.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Therefore—

Go ahead.

Ms. Julie Rioux: When they call the police, it's "You were probably making it up" if there's a restraining order. "Oh, they just want to see their children. That's why they came to your house." Those are the ones we hear about.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: How do we, in God's name, protect our children when these guys are out roaming the streets? We know they're going to do it again, and we're just allowing it. We need to be able to change the law—if anyone has anything to add to it—because I don't feel we're doing them any justice right now.

Ms. Julie Rioux: In my opinion, we're approaching this the wrong way.

Yes, they have rights. Yes, they're innocent until proven guilty. However, the victims have rights. Where's the risk management? Where is the permanent supervision order? As soon as there's an allegation, we always have supervision until it gets cleared up. None of that exists. It's very rare to get a supervised access order.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: One of the things I hear over and over again from police officers is that they feel their hands are tied. They go to the home and arrest the gentleman—Why did I call him a gentleman? He's a criminal.

They put him behind bars. He's out on bail, goes off again and is put back in jail. There is a situation.... I don't have the numbers and don't know if anyone here does. Some of these perpetrators are embedded. There's no way they will change.

Do you agree with that?

• (1725)

The Chair: Mrs. Roberts, that is your time, but I want to acknowledge that Ms. Neto has her hand up, if you'd like to acknowledge her.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't see that.

The Chair: No, that's okay. It's just for your awareness.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I'm sorry. Okay.

Oh, there are two of them.

The Chair: You can choose. I'm just bringing it to your awareness.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Yes, all right. I'll have....

Is it Carla?

Ms. Carla Neto: Yes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I'm sorry. Can I call you Carla?

Ms. Carla Neto: Yes, you can. Thank you very much

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Would you like to answer that?

Ms. Carla Neto: Yes.

I see your passion for this issue, and I share it. I think we need to establish very clear accountability structures. That starts at the top.

We have had situations with clients who have told their stories time and again in the court system. In fact, one thing that we believe happens is that coercive control is also facilitated through the courts and family law system, because these criminals, as you say, use the court systems to continue to manipulate and control. In fact, they sometimes threaten to kill the mother if the children choose to be with the mother.

Start at the top—

Mrs. Anna Roberts: It's not that I want to cut you off, but I want to add something else—

Ms. Carla Neto: We start at the top.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I just read a book, and it's called *Women Unsilenced*. We had the two women here from out east, from Nova Scotia. One of the things that kept me up at night was that I read in this book that families, parents, are having children in this country and getting them ready as young as 12 months old to sell them on the streets.

Why aren't we going after those individuals? The children are being abused by professionals, by doctors, by lawyers, by priests, by judges. Why are we not doing more to protect those children? I also found out—

The Chair: We have about 20 seconds.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Can somebody maybe...? I'm sorry, but I can't remember her name.

The Chair: She is with Little Warriors. It's Ms. Polzin-Holman.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Yes, the one with the hand up: Little Warriors.

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: Thank you. I'll be quick.

I think this is a more complicated conversation; it's not just about the offenders.

One of the things we see that I just want to add to the conversation is an ongoing problem with intergenerational trauma. When families and when mothers and other caregivers are in a place of trying to support children and youth, oftentimes, they themselves have a very long history of their own abuse. What we find in our program is that sometimes when their child is in the program for the very first time, they are actually talking about their own systemic and intergenerational trauma and abuse, and—

The Chair: Thank you, Wanda.

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: —it's for the first—

The Chair: Excellent.

Next, we welcome Lisa for five minutes.

Thank you.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

All of our witnesses are excellent today. I just want thank you all for your time and your attention. I'm going to stick with you, though, Julie.

I'm sorry, but I'm seized with the problem of parental alienation. We know that it's happening here in Canada; I've spoken to victims. There's a story from August 31, just a few days ago, out of Denver. The headline is, "Former Aurora cop charged with raping daughter remains free as mom is sent to jail". That's not Aurora, Ontario.

This is one of those cases of the kind you talked about. Dad is accused of raping his daughters, and he still goes free and is able to fight for custody of his two sons. When the mother protests, she's thrown in jail because she's opposed to this reunification therapy. I've heard from victims of this, and it doesn't sound like therapy to me; it sounds more like torture, and they're forced to take it. I find the whole thing appalling.

I want to go back to your opening statement. I'm not sure who you were quoting, but you said that parental alienation is "usually the mothers" and it's "psychological abuse". Maybe you can fill that in a little. From what I understand, parental alienation isn't actually a thing. It shouldn't be a term. We shouldn't be using it in court at all. It's just a flag; it's not a real thing.

Can you please comment on that?

Ms. Julie Rioux: The quote is actually from a training manual for workers for

• (1730)

[Translation]

the Quebec youth protection branch.

[English]

I'm seeing similar language being used in CAS in Ontario.

It's not therapy, because for you to have mental health therapy, you have to consent, and the children aren't consenting. Also, you're not gaslighted in therapy. These children go to reunification therapy, to RT, and they're told to forget about what their father did to them. They didn't understand; it didn't happen. The therapists actually get mad if they do.

In one case that I know of, the judge reversed custody; they cut off contact completely. I find it very ironic that for an estrangement, the solution is to estrange the child from the parent that they feel close to. One, you're damaging them psychologically, because you're breaking their effective link with their main parent. Two, you're telling them that what they lived isn't true and that they are to get over it. Three, you're forcing them into contact and custody with somebody that they have a genuine fear of. Even if the estrangement was not justified, it is still damaging to force somebody to see someone else against their will.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Coercive men don't just give up once a woman leaves the relationship. They're going to use every tool at their disposal. They're going to take what's available under the courts to use against their victim. I know that provincial court judges are supposed to take domestic violence into consideration when they're making these decisions. From my conversations with you, that's not happening.

Ms. Julie Rioux: That's not happening. I think it's a question of being confronted with the fact that for so many years they've accepted that alienation is real when it's not and they've probably made decisions that have harmed so many families. They do not want to believe that it is not real and that it is actually an abuse tool. They don't want to believe that. They are actually saying that the mothers are abusive because they're alienating. It just doesn't make sense.

No, in our opinion, they do not get better. That's what somebody who's more up to date on research would know better than I do, but they don't get better.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: I don't mean to cut you off. We know that teaching and more teaching and more training for judges doesn't seem to be working. We already have a law that says they're supposed to take the domestic violence into account when they're making these decisions. I'm wondering if you have any recommendations that would help us move forward.

Ms. Julie Rioux: I think there need to be judges who have extensive domestic violence training. Remember that it's still not mandatory for them to take that training. The training that's offered right now, I believe, is 90 minutes on Justice Canada's site. The 90 minutes is not going to do anything. That's part of it, and I think there needs to be an entirely different avenue for procedures when there's abuse.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: If we banned the term “parental alienation” and banned “reunification therapy”, do you think we'd be getting there?

Ms. Julie Rioux: We have to ban those and use definitions of what they are, because they're already starting to try to co-opt those and say it's family therapy or it's estrangement therapy and all kinds of terms. They're actually trying to say that PA, parental alienation, is coercive control. We have to define it in an act to say what we're banning.

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you, Lisa.

Next we have Andréanne. You have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Once again, I thank the witnesses, who enrich our thinking on this extremely important study.

The criminalization of coercive control is a request made by Quebec to Ottawa. It was studied as part of the report entitled “Rebuilding Trust”. Since the Criminal Code falls under federal jurisdiction, the Quebec government is asking the federal government to add coercive control to it.

Beyond this aspect, having had discussions with elected officials at the National Assembly, I know that the issue of online hate is also extremely worrying. There is a direct link between violence against women and online hate. How is it that we tolerate so much hate from groups like “incels”, or involuntary celibates, or influencers, who promote misogyny and who, as we can see, risk taking us backwards in terms of the image we perpetuate of women and this tolerance of violence against women—indeed, it goes as far as that. It's absolutely incredible.

Ms. Polzin-Holman, you touched on the issue of social networks. How do you see the link between online hatred and misogyny, and violence against women in 2024?

• (1735)

[English]

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: From the perspective of Little Warriors, we're seeing this in chat rooms and different online platforms that children and teens are involved in. Parents really have no idea about how to control this. We're seeing that in discussion groups, even at young ages, with girls to other girls, unfortunately, from a bullying perspective. It starts there as well, and definitely it is an ongoing problem that I think is worsening.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Yes, and many parents were shocked to discover misogynistic comments, and they were shocked to discover that their own boy was subscribed to influencers who promoted misogyny in some groups.

We have a duty to set an example. How can we think we're preventing violence against women if we allow this hatred to be perpetuated online and make young men believe that it's acceptable to commit violent acts against women? I can come back to that.

Thank you for your contribution, Ms. Polzin-Holman.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Leah, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Rioux, I want to go back to parental alienation. I'll give you an example.

In Manitoba, they have a program called For the Sake of the Children. They had this years ago. I don't think it was a bad program, because sometimes parents can be toxic and divorce, but sometimes there are cases in which parents are raising concerns, not to their children but to others, and there are real concerns in place.

Parental alienation is still in place, and it's still something that can be used in decision-making by courts. What kind of threat does it pose to individuals experiencing coercive abuse to be afraid to leave a situation? Let's say there's a violent parent. They know they're going to be able to look after a child even if they say something because of parental alienation. How does that, in reverse, impact on an individual's ability to leave a relationship?

Ms. Julie Rioux: I don't have the statistics, but I have heard many women say they would never have left if they had known at what level of risk their children would have been by leaving.

I also heard from a police officer directly who told me that they no longer—they as an individual officer—recommend that women leave if they see that it's not physical abuse. If it's coercive control and emotional abuse, they don't necessarily tell them to leave, because they know that it will get worse, and they know that their children will be at higher risk.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

This question is for Ms. Jeshani.

You spoke about long-term impacts of coercive control. You spoke about the constant feeling of fear, constant feelings of threat and how it has long-term impacts of post-traumatic stress disorder. I've heard it's very much like what war veterans experience.

Can you expand on that quickly?

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: We definitely have heard from survivors about the long-term impacts of such behaviour, to a point where they can't make basic decisions for themselves and their children, because all of that power has been taken away from them. They are constantly being told that they don't have the intellect or the competence to make any of those decisions over their own lives. They don't even know how to navigate that anymore. That is over years and years of tearing down that person and their sense of being.

• (1740)

The Chair: Thank you, Leah.

Michelle, you have five minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you so much to our witnesses today. This is a very tough topic. Thank you for the work that you do and the vicarious trauma that you have to experience every day. I say that to the people on the front line who are not doing okay. As my colleague Dominique said earlier, as all of these numbers have gone up, so has the responsibility on you to be on the front line to help all of these folks. I really do appreciate what you do.

This study is about coercive control and what we need to do as a government to talk about it, or change policy, or implement policy. I want to keep that at the forefront.

I'll go to the Safe Centre of Peel, and I believe it's Shelina.

Is it you who said there's a strangulation every single day?

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: Yes, that's correct.

According to Peel Regional Police statistics, we see one strangulation in our community a day. As I said, not all women report, so we know that it is an under-reported statistic.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: That's just shocking, horrific and awful.

Do you know how many of the perpetrators, primarily men, who are doing the strangling are out on bail?

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: Unfortunately, I don't have that data.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: One thing I'm seeing and hearing in my own community is that police officers are responding, but then their hands are tied because of the justice system. They try to help, but then they're sort of left with a miss because the man or whoever they've picked up is walking free.

There's a case in Newfoundland and Labrador that I spoke of over the summer. I don't know if you guys are familiar with this case, but it was pretty horrific. The young woman who was killed by her husband had five children. The women detectives who were talking to me about this.... There was so much pain and suffering. The consequences of coercive control are so much bigger than what we think. It's the front line, like yourselves, that is also taking this home. They said that they knew this was going to happen. They literally knew.

I can see all of you nodding your heads. You're seeing these strangulations escalate. It doesn't get better, as everyone here today has said.

One thing that I think is going to be very important for this study is an actual definition of coercive control. I think how we define this is going to be really key in moving forward.

I'm going to turn to Dr. Polzin-Holman from Little Warriors.

You guys do absolutely phenomenal work. What you do is actually life-changing work. This stat you said today of an 815% increase of online sexual luring of children is just awful. The sextortion that's happening and the human trafficking.... I've spoken with your organization about parents human trafficking their children, which has been around for a long time.

How would you define coercive control? If not everybody can answer it, could you submit to the committee what you would like to see as a definition? If I could get everybody to do that, I think that would be very valuable for us.

This is the other question I would ask Dr. Polzin-Holman. You've said you rely a lot on donations. Your organization does very well. You have very wonderful, gracious donors to help with a lot of the programming. How have you seen that the economy impacts donations?

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: First of all, thank you for the kind comments and for the ongoing support and awareness.

In terms of your first question on coercive control, I would be happy to take some time and thoughtfully put something forward.

With regard to the second question, we are definitely seeing a decrease in charitable donations being made. I know that some changes have occurred that have impacted us, but I also think our economy has definitely had an impact.

Little Warriors has been around since 2008. Up until this past year, we have had very little support other than community supporters and businesses providing financial supports for our children and teens to come. My hope is there are some ways to provide more access in a barrier-free way for children and teens for programs like ours and programs like those being represented today.

• (1745)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Michelle.

Anita, you have five minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you to all of the witnesses here today.

I have a number of questions. I'm not sure I'll get through all of them, but the amount of information you've given us is really incredible.

I would like to start with you, Julie, because some of the things you're describing, to be honest, defy logic. I think every one of us at the table is scratching our head and asking how this could happen, especially in our court system.

I wonder if you could elaborate a little bit. You said something in the beginning about people being sent to the United States and about an industry growing around this.

Could you talk about that?

My concern is that it sounds like the courts might be unwittingly facilitating coercive control without even realizing they're actually doing so.

Ms. Julie Rioux: I'm going to try to be politically correct. I don't know how unwitting it is when the AFCC is the one doing the training. It is a lobby group registered in California, and they do most of the judicial training. Their stated position on their American site is that they support alienation. Many of their members are the same therapists and social workers who charge over \$250 an hour for reunification therapy. They require anything from \$2,000 to \$15,000 in retainers, so they don't bill like a normal social worker or therapist would. You know, you normally go see your therapist, you pay for your appointment, and then insurance returns it. No, these people just have a blank card.

In the United States, there was a case.... Wilson v. Sinclair, I believe it is. I know the survivor. She was told to bring her children down to the U.S., to New York, to Turning Point or Building Family Bridges. She was told to tell her children that they were going on a holiday. They showed up, and then these transporters took them, and she had to pay over \$40,000 Canadian for the pleasure of having her children abused.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Just to be clear, these are Canadian children going to....

Who can make...?

Ms. Julie Rioux: The Canadian court is ordering this.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Who pays for this?

Ms. Julie Rioux: Often the woman is made to pay the majority, or half, and if they don't have the money and they had a family home that was sold and put into trust, that money is used. Most victims are not exceedingly rich.

Of course, the more wealthy the family, the worse it is, but oftentimes, by the time they are done court, they have nothing left for a down payment on a new house.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Just to be clear, the court order is to go to this particular form of therapy by this particular vendor, not to say that there needs to be therapy generally and that there's autonomy—

Ms. Julie Rioux: It has to be reunification therapy, and they will order the particular vendor, and these vendors prewrite the court orders so that there's a 90-day period of no contact, to be extended on the basis of what the therapist says. In one of these cases, I think she was up to about 600 days since seeing one of her children. In another case, it was over a year and a half, and they finally saw the boy. He didn't get on the bus and come to his mother's because he was told that if he did that, his mother would go to jail, so it is threat therapy.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: How prevalent is this?

Ms. Julie Rioux: There was talk about Peel. I think that's probably the worst place we hear about it. In the Peel and Brampton area, at that particular courthouse, you're very much at risk of having a parenting reversal and getting no contact.

There was a case around that area of a four-year-old and police enforcement. They removed the child, and the child was screaming and crying, and there were eight police officers. There are not that many of those cases in Ottawa because the Ottawa police send their lawyers to court to ask that the orders not be police-enforced.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: That goes to my other question, which is about the remedy. You're saying here that from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, these things are different. What would be a remedy, and at what level of government could this be done?

• (1750)

Ms. Julie Rioux: I think the practice of removing a child from their main caregiver to give them to the other parent, unless there are assault charges or abuse charges or there's a really high risk, needs to be banned. I think reunification therapy, if you describe it in that way, also needs to be banned, because basically what we're doing is similar to conversion therapy. It's an untrained professional with no domestic violence training. There is no regulation. Because parental alienation is not under the scope of practice for psychologists, they let it go, and the College of Social Workers seems to be mute on it, but that's where most of the practitioners are, in social work. If they get complaints, they just continue as unlicensed instead.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: You're making a very compelling case. I don't know if I have time for questions for the other witnesses.

The Chair: You do not. We're already about 30 seconds over, so we'll wrap up at that.

In saying that, this has been some pretty alarming testimony.

I would like to go into a third round. I have been somewhat lenient with some of the time, so for our members in the room and for our witnesses, I will be firm and tight on the minutes moving forward. We'll have five minutes, five minutes, two and a half, two and a half, five and five.

We'll start with Dominique. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I'll get back to my topic.

Ms. Rioux, I'm very interested in parental alienation.

Madam Chair, let me know 30 seconds before the end of my time, because I have a question for Ms. Jeshani.

With regard to reunification therapy and reunification camps, if I understood Ms. Vandenberg's question correctly, it's not necessarily the result of a court order.

Did I understand correctly, or am I mistaken?

Ms. Julie Rioux: The court gives the order, but it's the therapists who write the prescription. It becomes almost impossible to get out of it. As soon as you oppose it, it's seen as alienating behaviour.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: So you are before the court, which declares that you must undergo reunification therapy. That's how it is done.

Does reunification therapy include the father and mother? Are the children present?

Ms. Julie Rioux: There are different stages. What I've heard from victims is that the process often starts with the parents. We often hear that the mother has to apologize. She has to write a letter apologizing for her alienating behaviour due to her abusive ways. Children are obliged to attend sessions with the father. When we talk about camps, we're talking about spending two or three days in isolation with the other parent and therapists, who are sometimes abusive.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: The more we hear about this, the worse it sounds.

What is the purpose of reunification therapy?

Ms. Julie Rioux: It's about forcing the child to have a relationship with the father. This is done when the child refuses to have a relationship with the other parent or wants to minimize contact with the other parent. When there's an order and the child doesn't want to go spend the weekend at his father's or sleep over, that's when it happens.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: So they draw the conclusion that if the child doesn't want to go to his father or doesn't want to talk to him, it's because there has been parental alienation on the part of the mother.

Ms. Julie Rioux: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] ... question of loyalty, and it's the youth protection branch, or YPB, that takes this action.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Okay.

You tell us that reunification therapies aren't even taught in courses for psychologists.

Where does this concept come from? What university program does it appear in?

You can't improvise yourself as a reunification specialist overnight, especially when it's based on bizarre foundations.

• (1755)

Ms. Julie Rioux: Courses on this kind of therapy are given in the United States.

The concept comes from an American psychologist who claims to be in favour of pedophilia. It is not accepted in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or DSM, nor in the UN's International Diagnostic Book.

So they are self-described specialists.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Judges aren't all complete lunatics. They're brilliant, intelligent, trained, educated people who have a lot of judgment since they were appointed as judges.

However they're going in a direction that you describe to us as excessively problematic.

How do you explain that?

Ms. Julie Rioux: It's an easy solution. Even if the child doesn't want to go, they're sent to reunification therapy. They don't have to listen to abuse stories they don't want to hear.

It's a concept some psychologists have believed in for several years.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: All right.

I don't want to get tomatoes thrown at me, but, in your experience—I'll close on this, Madam Chair—out of all the parental alienation cases, how many are warranted, in your opinion?

Ms. Julie Rioux: Honestly, I'd say none of them.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: That's excellent.

Emmanuella, you have five minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, and thank you to all of our witnesses for being here with us to answer some questions on this important topic.

You have all expressed the great concern with coercive control. We all agree that it's an extremely important thing we need to look at. It's the first step in an abusive relationship, so it could definitely escalate and become violent and much worse, and it has major psychological impacts on women and children.

Does everyone on the panel today agree that coercive control needs to be criminalized? You can all respond.

I see nodding everywhere.

From what I understand and from the conversation that has been had so far, currently it is not seen or recognized as an actual issue, so if somebody does report it to the police, it's just not considered and nothing is done about it.

We have spoken about parental alienation as well. From what I've heard now, psychologists are the ones who kind of... Can you clarify?

Ms. Julie Rioux: Social workers are the ones that are promoting this, except in Quebec. Psychologists are promoting it in Quebec, as well as social workers.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I'm wondering why that would be. Obviously psychologists in Quebec have training and understand how the brain works and how a child's psychology will be impacted by certain decisions that are made.

I guess I struggle a little bit with putting a ban on something like parental alienation. The reason I struggle with it is that I'm sure there are cases in which on either part, the mother's or the father's, it may actually be at play.

What safeguards can we put in place if we are going to go that route?

Ms. Julie Rioux: SHERA, in the U.K., has done some research, and they call it CAMS. It's getting rid of the maternal bond; it's separation.

In the case of the laws on coercive control in the U.K., it has been found that if there's sufficient training of police officers under the Crown and you look at it through a lens of domestic violence first, it becomes very clear who the problematic parent is, because yes, there's counter-parenting that happens, but it's not alienation.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay.

Would you happen to have statistics on how often the mother is the one accused of parental alienation, versus the father?

Ms. Julie Rioux: There are statistics on the VAW network's website, and they're Canadian studies. I don't know them offhand, but it's a good 70% or 80% of the mothers.

• (1800)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I'm also directing this to everybody. I see that someone has their hand up. If you want to jump in, you can.

My question is this: Is there a nuanced way of approaching this, or is it just a ban? I'm curious about that, because I think children do benefit from having a relationship with—

Ms. Carla Neto: If I may—

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: —both parents, generally, but not if there's abuse.

Ms. Carla Neto: There needs to be a distinction between a dysfunctional relationship that ends in divorce with parents bickering and an abusive relationship. What we're talking about here is an abusive relationship, a relationship in which there is clear violence, such as physical violence, but also one in which there is coercive control. We need to look at it from that lens.

They are using parental alienation to dismiss the claims of abuse. That's what they're using. I think that we need to be clear. We need to have this conversation within the context of broader dynamics. We need to look at patriarchy. We need to look at misogyny. We need to look at violence against women generally.

I will stop now and ask Wanda to continue because I know time is limited.

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: I want to make a couple of comments.

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds or less. Thank you, Wanda.

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: Sure.

As someone who works with a trained psychologist and as a clinical social worker myself, I don't believe that it's social workers who are using the term "coercive control"; perhaps it's caseworkers within CFS.

I can't speak specifically for Quebec, but in other provinces, at Little Warriors we are seeing this coming from lawyers in domestic violence situations.

I would agree with Ms. Neto that further conversation is needed, with a clear capturing of the terms.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Andréanne, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't know if I'll have another turn, but I'm going to address you, Ms. Rioux. I've been questioning one witness per round of questioning, and you're next.

Since we're talking about the situation in Quebec, I'd like to point out that, in addition to the people who support the criminalization of coercive control, beyond the political examples I gave earlier, there are also community groups. Just last week, I met with a group of community organizations. In Quebec, they are mainly funded by the Quebec health and social services system to help victims.

We really need to see violence against women as an issue requiring a continuum of services. So, recognizing coercive control as a crime is important, so that women can say to themselves that there's a chance that what they've been subjected to will be recognized, right up to the point of accompaniment, to help them heal. We also need financial resources to help them. So it's important to invest in our health care system so that we can help organizations in the field to support victims.

Can you talk about the importance of ensuring this continuum of services and making these investments in our health care system, beyond the legal system?

Ms. Julie Rioux: First of all, the MH2 Alliance in Quebec does incredible work. What you're mentioning is vitally important, especially when it comes to mental health services. Children are permanently scarred by the trauma they've experienced, and so are mothers. We experience active trauma every time we're forced to have contact with our abuser in order to co-parent.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: It is therefore crucial to continue making investments in the health care system to help organizations support victims. There's a direct link between the assistance given to organizations and the number of people they can support in the field, so we have to give them the means to do their job.

Ms. Julie Rioux: Yes, it's important.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: I'll end quickly by talking about another group, since I have about 10 seconds left. I mentioned community politicians, but I'd also like to talk to you about the Juripops group, which accompanies victims and is also calling for the recognition of coercive control.

How important is such a request in helping victims?

• (1805)

Ms. Julie Rioux: Yes, it's extremely important—

[English]

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds.

[Translation]

Ms. Julie Rioux: It's extremely important. In fact, we're in contact with this group. I think there should be Juripops across the country.

[English]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Leah, you have two and a half minutes.

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

I'm really interested in this reunification therapy, because, for example, in the riding I represent—certainly a part of the riding that will be added after the next election—we have the highest number of kids in child welfare and many families requiring reunification

therapy for various reasons, such as the impacts of colonization on families.

I'm interested in hearing another perspective on that, so I wanted to ask you, Madam Polzin-Holman, for your perspective on reunification therapy. My concern is that sometimes there are lots of grey areas. It's kind of like parental alienation and questions about issues around that. Could you expand on that? What are your thoughts?

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: On reunification therapy, from my perspective and in my own training, if you have a therapist or a clinician who's working with a child and a family and is trauma-informed and is using best practices, what is being described is not a best practice. What is needed is for professionals to be properly trained with trauma-informed approaches that are also culturally informed and for independent therapy to be offered to the child in conjunction with perhaps both parents having their own therapy.

When those things are put forward, a more robust picture can be formed as a result of different perspectives, versus reunification therapy being cited as the most important go-forward plan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

I asked that because, for example, for kids in the child welfare system, we call that a pipeline to murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. What they found is it's actually often more traumatic for kids to be taken away from their families than to be reunited with their families. It has a detrimental impact on the parent, and also a detrimental impact on the child.

The Chair: Thank you, Leah.

Anna, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to direct my questions to Ms. Polzin-Holman. I hope I pronounced that properly. Excuse me if I didn't.

You stated earlier that 29% reoffend after they are released, and you mentioned that 90% of offenders are known to children. One in four girls and one in six boys are exposed to sexual assault before the age of 18.

I need to ask you this question because I'm really concerned about this. Sexual assaults are up 75% and sexual violations against children are up 119% since Trudeau took power, and yesterday Toronto police arrested a man while he was already out on bail after allegedly sexually assaulting three women at a York University campus.

Can you please help me understand? When these individuals are being let out to continually abuse women, how do we change that so that we can protect the women and the children?

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: Unfortunately, this pertains not only to women but also children. I don't think a day goes by in Sherwood Park and the Edmonton area without a posting displayed by the police or the RCMP that a dangerous criminal of concern has been released. We've had numerous situations in which they have reoffended within weeks or even days. It is quite predictable, unfortunately, and the supports to ensure that vulnerable people are safe are not in place.

● (1810)

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I am going to bring up something, and I hope my colleague won't be upset with me. She shared a story with me during her tour in Newfoundland about the man who ended up killing his wife and children and who went back to the mosque and basically said to other women—his words—“This is what happens when you don't listen to us.”

How do we change the thinking of these...? I call them criminals; you can call them.... If you want to try to rehabilitate them, I don't know how that will happen, but how do we change that thinking?

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: From my perspective, I think we don't have proper deterrents in place. I think that is an incredibly clear example of misogyny, and our systems are not in place to protect people.

My thoughts on that are that prior to that happening, as we've talked about today, there were probably numerous red flags in the community and within families that unfortunately could have predicted that.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: We need to make sure that the community, the families, the friends and everyone who is around these situations comes out and speaks up about it so that this doesn't happen.

However, I think that a lot of times women are so intimidated that they're afraid for their own safety and the safety of their own families because they are living in a very similar situation. How do we change the law to make sure that these issues and these crimes don't continue?

Do you have any suggestions besides putting these people in jail forever?

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: I certainly think it's a matter of having clear deterrents, and when people are charged, we have to follow through with those charges. We see that this doesn't happen.

One other thought I have is that there is, and should be, a duty to report this. The conflict there is that in having a duty to report, there are women and other vulnerable populations who don't feel that they can, because they can't safely report what they know is happening in their homes and in their communities.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I'm going to go back to a story that happened in my community, unfortunately, where two doctors—

The Chair: Anna, I'm sorry.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: That's not five minutes.

The Chair: It was.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I think we need to get you a new timer.

The Chair: Marc, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd also like to thank the four witnesses today. I think this has given us a lot of alarming information, no doubt, but it will also enrich our study.

I'll put my question to Ms. Rioux, to Ms. Jeshani, and then to the other witnesses, if we have time.

I'd like to understand one thing better. It's often said that the police's hands are tied. They say it's a problem associated with the justice system. The justice system is very vast. It's often said that the administration of justice falls under provincial jurisdiction, but at the federal level, we manage the Criminal Code as well as the family courts.

When we talk about reforming the bail system, that's also under provincial jurisdiction. So I'd like to understand one thing better. I'd like to address both Ms. Rioux and Ms. Jeshani. As for definitions, we've talked about definitions of parental alienation, reunification therapy and, obviously, coercive control.

How can we clearly define the role of the federal government in family courts?

Can you try to explain the federal and provincial roles in this area?

I put the question first to Ms. Rioux and Ms. Jeshani, and then to Ms. Polzin-Holman and Ms. Neto.

Ms. Julie Rioux: I think we have some well-recognized experts in the country, starting with Simon Lapierre at the University of Ottawa. There are widely accepted definitions of these concepts, but I think the federal government could show some leadership. The RCMP is doing work in municipalities across the country. I don't see why the federal government can't develop training, policies and tools for police forces, and pass them on to the provinces and municipalities.

They say the police have their hands tied; they, in turn, often tell us that the level of seriousness isn't high enough to lay a criminal charge. So it's not criminal harassment for any number of reasons. That said, later on we see arrests in cases where the same behaviour has taken place, but against strangers. So it's also a question of culture.

● (1815)

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Serré: Shelina, would you have anything to add? Maybe Wanda could add something afterward.

Wanda, do you have anything to add on the provincial and federal definitions, and how that links for the clinical...?

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: Just to add to what was said, I would say that we do absolutely need to have more clarity with regard to what is coercive control. Yes, we need to look at the definitions and whether or not to move forward with parental alienation, given what has been said today.

I think that under the current laws, there are some very significant issues. There is an important need to bring people together to address this, not only for women but also for children and families overall.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré: Ms. Jeshani, did you want to add something?

[*English*]

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: Thank you.

I want to add that it's about penetrating communities with understanding what coercive control is and what it looks like. We need opportunities to partner with different community groups so that we can talk about healthy relationships and talk about supports that are available for people to access. We're not putting responsibilities on community members to bring somebody forward, but for the community to build their capacity to understand what this issue is and what supports are there.

In one of the programs we're running right now, we have a police officer teamed up with our social workers. They go out to verbal domestic situations where there are no charges laid. Those are homes where we're seeing coercive control. This is an opportunity for us to go in with police officers who are trained and work alongside us, where we can influence one another, and we can get in and say, "Okay, there is help here. There is support." Sometimes the first place people call—

The Chair: I'm going to have to leave it at that.

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: —is 911.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you.

I'm looking around the room for consensus. We have 10 minutes left. Are we comfortable with each of you having a round for two and a half minutes? We'll all get two and a half minutes. That way it will bring us right to the end.

Okay.

We'll start with Michelle for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much, Chair.

Thanks again to everyone here for this discussion on coercive control and bringing forward some recommendations that will hopefully save lives.

I want to talk with Wanda.

I'm sorry. I'm distracted by what Shelina just said, because what I've seen is.... My brain is going in two different directions. There's just so much information here.

You just talked about the police bringing a social worker with them. What I've seen in my ride-alongs with the police is that police have become social workers. They are not even able to do their

real job of enforcing the law anymore, because it's just become this vicious cycle.

I was fortunate enough to visit the Toba Centre. Have any of you ever worked with the Toba Centre?

Wanda, do you have any intake from the Toba Centre?

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: We do.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Okay, thank you. I was hoping you would say that.

It's a brilliant centre in what they do with the children. They are able to do court from inside this beautiful building, this beautiful space. They are doing those kinds of things.

I'll go back to what you said earlier in one of your answers about the generational trauma. With regard to education, and let's go upstream. I think we've talked a little bit about intervention and giving a definition to coercive control and what we need to change in the justice system and how to ensure that these criminals aren't out on bail, etc.

If we can go to the prevention end of things and the generational trauma, one of the big things I'm hearing from guards in the jail system is that they don't have the training or that the programming isn't in place to rehabilitate men when they do go into the system. They're often coming out worse than when they went in. They're not learning why they are violent. They're not learning why they are abusive. They're not getting better.

Julie is looking at me too. I'm open to anybody who wants to answer this.

I guess I'm talking about the prevention end of it. What would you add in the recommendations for this report for prevention and ensuring we understand healthy relationships and break generational trauma?

● (1820)

The Chair: There are only about 15 seconds, so—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Oh, my gosh. I'm sorry.

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: I can quickly answer something, and thank you for the question.

I want to say that in our "prevent it" program, we touch upon this. With regard to intergenerational trauma, it is for caregivers but also for children. What we're seeing is that when children come to us, sometimes the offending behaviour is more difficult to sort out between that and the trauma responses.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Lisa, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thank you, Chair.

I want to go back to Emmanuella's question about whether to bring in a coercive control law.

It seems as if everyone here around the table is in favour of a law against coercive control. However, I'd like to hear from all of you on whether you have concerns about it backfiring and being used as a weapon against victims of domestic violence.

Julie, do you want to start?

Ms. Julie Rioux: Sure.

Anything we bring in will be used as a weapon. That's our opinion, because DARVO—which is “deny, attack and reverse victim and offender”—is a common strategy of abusers. It doesn't matter what we bring in. They will try to use it.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: It's still worth bringing in a law, then. Thank you.

I'll go to the rest of you—Wanda, Shelina and Carla.

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: I think that men who use coercive control use any system they can to continue to gain further control of the situation. Yes, the law is great to have, in order to hold people accountable, but it can also absolutely backfire.

My worry is that there are many women who are living under the conditions of coercive control who will never call the police and never be known. Those children continue to be exposed. Those women continue to suffer. I think we have to be thinking about this strategy upstream. How do we build a fence at the top of that hill so we can protect those children from becoming future abusers or future victims?

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thank you.

Carla, do you want to go next?

Ms. Carla Neto: Absolutely.

There's no time. What I'm suggesting is that we submit to you some of our proposals around prevention.

I concur with my colleagues. Definitely, anything will be used, but it is important for coercive control to be recognized.

Also, please remember that we have a family law system and criminal system that don't always talk.

Let's also talk about the stigmatization of communities. That's why they don't report to the police. There is an assumption that abuse only happens in some communities or to “those people”. Abuse happens in every culture, in every human culture.

I would welcome the opportunity to submit something in written form.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Yes, please. That's an excellent suggestion. If you have any ideas about how we can fix the disconnect between a family court and the criminal court, please include that in your submission.

Ms. Carla Neto: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Neto and Lisa.

Andréanne, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Once again, thank you to the witnesses.

Now that I've had the opportunity to speak to each witness, I'm going to ask a question that's for everyone.

In recent months, I took part in a meeting that focused on violence against women. This meeting was organized by women's groups. Representatives from community groups, elected municipal officials, municipal police forces and the Sûreté du Québec, as well as representatives from the office of the Quebec Minister of Public Security took part. As you can see, everyone has to get involved.

I'd like to talk about the issue of coercive control, specifically. At the meeting, I heard a lot about Bill C-332. This federal bill opened the door to including coercive control. Of course, all the parties have spoken out on this one, with some reservations.

Are you aware of this bill?

What improvements would you make to the next bill that will deal with the criminalization of coercive control?

• (1825)

Ms. Julie Rioux: It's a bit complicated and it's not my area of expertise.

I know we work with victims who have an opinion in this regard. I think it would be better if I sent you a more detailed written answer.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Do any other witnesses wish to comment on Bill C-332? We're aware that legislation criminalizing coercive control won't solve everything. So, if you'd like to comment on Bill C-332 or on the issue of concerted action on the continuum of services offered to victims, you have about 30 seconds. You could even speak to the issue of funding the health system to help victim support groups.

[English]

Ms. Shelina Jeshani: The bill recognizes that this is not right, that this is a problem, that this is what it looks like and that people have to be held accountable, but I think the funding for services to catch people early in those prevention strategies is essential.

We know a majority of women will go first to their health care provider or religious leader when they're having difficulties within their families and intimate relationships, so we need to be educating those key stakeholders, because they are the gatekeepers to the service pathways that can unfold for those women and their children.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Leah, you have two and a half minutes.

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

My last question I'd like to ask to a couple of people, but I will start with Madame Polzin-Holman.

You said something that is very concerning for me, which was that your organization relies on core donations. It's concerning for me because, especially for the area you're working in, we know that services for child sexual abuse are already really underfunded. It's disturbing to me that you have to rely on donations to provide services that are already lacking. If we're serious about gender-based violence, do you think that we need to ensure that women's organizations are prioritized in budgets to ensure that you have the core funding you need to help the kids and victims you need to help?

Maybe keep your answer short so that I can ask—

Ms. Wanda Polzin-Holman: Yes. I think you said it very well. We definitely need core funding in place.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'll pass it on, but just as a segue, one of the calls for justice is sustainable funding—not year-to-year funding, but long-term sustainable funding within that core funding.

I see that Madam Neto has her hand up, and then it will go to the last two.

Ms. Carla Neto: I want to make a recommendation: We need to stop funding organizations by using a charity model. We need to move on to a social investment model.

Organizations like ours shouldn't have to depend on charity. This is a public issue. This is everyone's issue. I support Wanda's assertion. We need to make sure that organizations are able to support the survivors, but we also need to ensure that prevention is prioritized, because otherwise we are going to be back here year after year and study after study.

I will put the rest of my assertions and recommendations on paper again.

• (1830)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Can you submit that in writing? If anybody has any other recommendations they want to provide to the committee, you're welcome to submit it in writing.

I'm reading your eyes, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Leah.

Thank you to all members and to all of the witnesses for your testimony today.

At this point, is the committee in agreement to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: 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>