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Chair: Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman



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• (1635)

[English]

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

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 130 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

[English]

I would like to remind all members of the following points.

Please wait until I recognize you by name prior to speaking. I remind you that all comments ought to be addressed through the chair.

[Translation]

Thank you all for your co-operation in that respect.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 25, 2024, the committee will continue its study on gender-based violence and femicides against women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide a trigger warning. We will be discussing experiences related to violence and femicides. This may be triggering to viewers with similar experiences. If indeed at any point you are feeling distressed or need help, please advise the clerk.

For all witnesses and for all members of Parliament, it's very important that we recognize that these are very difficult discussions, and we ought to be compassionate with our conversations.

For today's panel, I'd like to welcome Sunder Singh, who is with the Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women. She's executive director and is joining us by video conference.

From Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes, we have Julie St-Pierre Gaudreault, policy issues adviser, joining us by video conference. We're also joined by video conference by Manon Monastesse, executive director with the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes.

We also have Dr. Amanda Buffalo, adviser, Liard Aboriginal Women's Society.

There's been a little bit of movement with some of our witnesses who have had some trouble with their technology, so I'm trying to make sure we have the right ones here.

Last, of course, we have Jill Young in the room. She is chief executive officer of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters.

Welcome to all witnesses and of course to all members.

We will begin with opening statements of five minutes from each organization.

To begin, I'd like to welcome Ms. Singh. The floor is yours for five minutes.

Ms. Sunder Singh (Executive Director, Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is Sunder Singh. I am the executive director of the Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women, otherwise known as the EHCW, located in Toronto and in the city of Vaughan.

Victims of domestic violence visit these centres, and anywhere from 100 to 300 cases come in every year. We witness the victims' helplessness in fighting the legal system and law enforcement, including child protection agencies that, as we have experienced in many cases, do not understand the terror of the abused victims who are being threatened with having their children being taken away due to their emotional outbursts. Emotional outbursts are recorded as mental instability.

We have seen cases of mothers being accused of having a mental disturbance when it was an emotional outcry at losing their children. They are crying for help, but the children are taken away because the abuser is perceived as polite, calm and convincing—but he is a chronic manipulator.

At the centre, we witnessed a classic story of a woman arriving from another country as a new bride. She married out of love to a man who had been previously married. His first wife ran away from him. Now he was seeking a new wife so that his abuse could continue. When the new bride, whom I will call Cindy, arrived in Canada, full of love for her husband, she faced domestic violence from him and her mother-in-law.

When Cindy was pregnant, he broke her arm, affecting her elbow. She went through surgery to save her elbow. He broke the same arm again, seriously affecting the movement of her elbow. She gave birth to a child, whom she carried precariously in one arm. The other arm was damaged. Her husband continued to beat her.

She came to the centre asking for help. She was placed in housing and landed a good job in her field. She was an accountant. She was on her way to self-sufficiency, away from her husband, but then the luring and apologies started, and false promises were made to her by her husband. She agreed to go back to him. The man started to record her each and every movement. She was not aware.

Her mother-in-law spread oil all over the kitchen for her to slip on and fall at night when she came to fetch milk for her child. She fell and permanently damaged her elbow.

The husband recorded a video in which she was precariously changing the diaper of the child with one hand and the other damaged arm. The child was kicking and she was stopping the child from kicking. He took a portion of that video and gave it to the police. The police handed the video to the child protection agency, which threatened Cindy with the removal of her child. This started a panic. She talked non-stop with the loud cry of a torn mother and repeatedly tried to express to anyone who could hear her that she was alone in this country and violently abused, and now law enforcement and the child protection agency were taking her child away.

When the EHCW inquired, it was revealed that the child protection agency was not at all aware that the husband had been violently abusing Cindy.

The child protection agency provided evidence to the court projecting Cindy to be a mother who was mentally unstable. The child was given to the father.

Cindy's doctor, her teacher and the police had reported the abuse and wrote letters clearly stating that the child should remain with the mother. Because she was unable to control her emotions, this went against her with some of the organizations she was supposed to trust.

Disgusted by the legal system, she left the country and went to the United States to live with her family. She's now using a fake account to remain secretly connected to her son. Mother and son are patiently waiting until he is of an adult age so that he can be reunited with his mother.

Are bodies that provide protection effectively safeguarding mothers and children? Law enforcement is doing good work. However, it needs to be aware of how mothers become traumatized when threatened with being ripped apart from their children.

Shelters are running at full capacity, and housing for women facing violence is not easily available either. Why is this issue not a serious societal problem for the government?

Why are the abusers placed in jail for two days, two weeks or two years when the life of a woman is completely destroyed emotionally? She is as good as dead. Children are affected permanently. Why are the abusers not in jail for a lifetime? If they were, violence would be reduced instantly.

Please make domestic violence training for all judges in the court system a mandatory requirement. This would help safeguard women.

Thank you.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your opening statement.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to invite Ms. Monastesse and Ms. St-Pierre Gaudreault to take the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Manon Monastesse (Executive Director, Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes): Good morning. My name is Manon Monastesse and I'm executive director of the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes. With me today is our policy issues advisor Julie St-Pierre Gaudreault.

The Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes represents 60 shelters in Quebec, both first-line or emergency shelters and second-stage shelters. We're the only association in Quebec that welcomes any woman who is a victim of violence against women, not just women who are victims of domestic violence. So we take in women who are victims of multiple forms of violence, including sexual assault, domestic violence, sexual exploitation or honour-based violence, for example.

In terms of our capacity to accommodate, our occupancy rate is currently 106%. When women call us, we unfortunately have to turn them away because we don't have enough room. That translates into 11,000 women who are refused our services.

As you know, there have been about 20 femicides in Quebec. Of the women we take in, 26% tell us they have been victims of death threats or attempted murder. In addition, 25% want to file a complaint, as opposed to 38% who don't. In Quebec, we now have specialized courts for sexual and domestic violence, but they haven't yet been established in all judicial districts. We will see what impact they have on how much women who are victims of violence trust in our justice system.

You may recall the landmark report published in Quebec entitled "*Rebâtir la confiance*", which was about rebuilding that trust among female victims. The report contained 190 recommendations. Some recommendations have been implemented, but only fairly recently. So in the next few years, we will be able to better gauge the impact of this report and the various measures taken.

We have concerns about the federal government's national action plan to end gender-based violence, more specifically about meeting the objectives and implementing the plan's foundation. We're also part of the Women's Shelters Canada network, and we can see that women unfortunately still don't have access to the same services or the same quality of service across the country.

The implementation of the national action plan is built on a solid foundation made up of three components.

As we know, the first component is leadership, coordination and engagement.

The second component is data. In this regard, it must be said that Statistics Canada reports pose a major problem for us, because they don't take into account power relationships, domination relationships and, among other things, coercive control. We're dealing with data that's based on a symmetric distribution of the genders, and that's not at all consistent with the data from our provincial reports. I think it's the same thing across Canada. We've been speaking out against Statistics Canada's methodology for years. Therefore, we need data across Canada that truly reflects the state of affairs when it comes to violence against women.

There's also the third component, reporting and monitoring.

• (1645)

In our view, the way progress on the three components is measured poses a problem. Accountability-wise, the measures implemented under the federal action plan should undergo a comprehensive assessment and should be aligned with provincial ones.

We are therefore very supportive of the findings in the report released by the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, which calls on the federal government to create a gender-based violence commissioner. The commissioner's office would be an independent mechanism responsible for ensuring accountability, assessing the situation across the country and determining how the many provincial action plans align with the federal government's. The idea would be, first, to better identify best practices and, second, to see how federal leadership can—

• (1650)

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt. If you could kindly wrap up your thoughts, that would be excellent. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Monastesse: All right.

With that in mind, other issues have to be taken into account. They include more funding for shelters, a focus on danger assessment, as well as better coordination and consistency when it comes to statistical data and the implementation of the national action plan to end gender-based violence.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Prior to moving to our next witness, could I please remind all witnesses who are online to adjust their mic boom? It should be just above the mouth and just below the nose. That will ensure that we have the best sound for our translation.

Next I would like to welcome Madame Jeanson.

[Translation]

You have five minutes.

Ms. Martine Jeanson (President, Founder and Front-Line Worker, La Maison des Guerrières): Good afternoon. I am the founder of La Maison des Guerrières, but I am also a victim who was left for dead.

The system is full of holes, and we are still trying to understand why. In my case, I was left for dead 30 years ago, and nothing has changed since. I would even say that things have gotten worse.

Court delays are appallingly long. We tell women to go to shelters that they have to leave two or three months later. Where are their violent spouses then? They are still there when the women leave the shelter. There should be no court delays. The courts should act right away.

We tell women to leave their homes, their furniture, their possessions, their jobs, everything they have, even though they are the victims and their spouses are the violent ones. In Quebec, no therapy is available for these violent men; there is no place where they can go for help. I think we need to build homes for violent men and put those men there. Instead of basic therapy once a week, they should have to undergo full-time therapy with experts who could appear in court and explain the danger these men pose. As other witnesses have pointed out, it's the victim's word against the perpetrator's in court. The women are often very emotional. I was when I went to court. I was a victim who had been left for dead, so naturally, I was crying, I was very emotional, I was scared.

We also have a lot of issues with our youth protection branch in Quebec. I deal with those cases in my job. All women who are victims of domestic violence have their children taken away from them, either because they are accused of being alienating or because their situations are considered separation disputes. Domestic violence is not a separation dispute. Women suffer the violence, and the children see it happen. The children are just as much victims as their mothers.

The child protection workers we deal with are not well trained. They do not understand the situation. To them, the man is a nice guy, a good guy, but he is a manipulator who is manipulating all of society. When people see these stories in the news, they always say how nice and polite so-and-so was and how they never would have suspected he would do something like that. The same thing happens in the child protection system. The people working in the system aren't at all able to assess the situation correctly. When I get involved in cases, I see that the caseworkers are totally incapable of recognizing domestic violence. They see the situation as a separation dispute. The mother has left everything. She has lost everything, and on top of it all, her children are taken away and handed back over to a violent father. That is serious.

As I said, the justice system is the same. I testify in court in all the cases I work on, and judges have absolutely no understanding of domestic violence. It's the mother's word against the father's. However, the mother is not always able to record, or provide evidence of, her bruises, the blows she suffered or everything that happened in the home.

The most important thing I want to talk to about today pertains to the court delays. I have clients who wait two, even three, years before they get to testify against their attacker in a criminal proceeding. That whole time, the women are living in constant fear. They cannot stay in women's shelters forever. These violent men have access to them at all times. It's no trouble; they can use Facebook or some other way to find their victims. They go to their workplace, or they follow the kids after school or some other family member.

Cases involving domestic violence should be dealt with by a judge right away, on a priority basis. That's how it works in cases involving the youth protection branch. The branch can intervene in an emergency. Victims of domestic violence should have the same rights. Women should be the ones able to roam free, while the men are put someplace. They are the guilty ones. They are the ones who should go to a centre or home for follow-up.

That is my message for you today.

• (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for sharing that.

Next I would like to welcome Dr. Buffalo.

You have the floor for up to five minutes. Thank you.

Dr. Amanda Buffalo (Advisor, Liard Aboriginal Women's Society): Thank you.

The Liard Aboriginal Women's Society has made our submission to the standing committee, and we have a bunch of reference documents that we've sent along.

What I want to impart to the committee is that indigenous women and girls are reluctant to report violence to police, especially in the territory. There's significant violence that goes on with respect to the extractive resource industries in the Yukon. The National Inquiry into MMIWG and the May 2022 report from the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action provided evidence of RCMP misogyny, racism and sexualized violence against indigenous women, and we feel the effects, certainly, of that in the territory.

For as long as resource extraction industries have claimed unceded territories of our peoples, indigenous nations have resisted the unsustainable colonial state and the extractive industry practices enforced by the RCMP of land theft, dispossession and violence against women.

We thank the committee for undertaking a study on the national crisis of gender-based violence and femicide and present recommendations for action and consideration.

Kaska Dena, our matriarchal society composed of Tsíyōné' Dena and Mésǵá Dena, which are wolf clan and crow clan respectively, and LAWS, as we're known, uphold the Kaska Dena traditional law of Dene Á'Nezen, which is to care for our lands and waters as our relations.

We reject the unjust free entry mining regime that allows anyone to put up stakes to act over indigenous lands without the free, prior and informed consent of Kaska rights holders. This regime has re-

sulted in significant harms to women and caused environmental, social, cultural, economic and spiritual damage in Dene Kēyeh, which are our Kaska Dena unceded territories. The 25-square-kilometre abandoned Faro lead-zinc mine site is one such example of this destruction. Contamination reaches far beyond the mine site.

LAWS opposes the violence against indigenous women and girls and the environmental damage that accompany colonial resource development practices. We want to heal the scars on our women and our lands.

We have a number of reports that we have tabled, which you will see in the notes. What I do want to say is that we've done studies, we've been on the ground and we know the damage that is done by these industries. So that you understand, in numbers, between 2014 and 2021, there were seven femicides in the Yukon, six of which were indigenous women.

Indigenous women represent 86% of the victims of femicide in the Yukon during that time period. That is also the highest rate of femicide against indigenous women in Canada. In Kaska country, this is particularly important, because Kaska Dena women represent more than 50% of all missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in the Yukon.

Our work has been around demonstrating how the mining industry's colonial ethic of exploitation degrades ways that indigenous and racialized women mine workers are treated in male-dominated workplaces, in camp living conditions and in our communities. We talk a lot in the studies that we've submitted to you about workplace health and sexualized assault safety regulations within the camps, but also within our communities. Reporting is particularly problematic, because our women are afraid to go to the RCMP or to the authorities, and we want to do more to keep our women safe in our communities.

I'll ask that you refer to the document provided to review the submissions, but I have some recommendations for action as well.

We want to ask the standing committee to recognize that the use of euphemistic terms like "development" and "resource development" that imply growth, progress and positive change fail to account for the reality of the colonial projects in Canada. Indigenous peoples are displaced in order to steal lands and resources for the economic, political and social benefit of private corporations, settlers and the state: provincial, territorial and federal governments. The historic settler colonial practices of extracting furs, forests, fish, minerals and other resources have enacted violence on indigenous peoples; devalued our social, cultural and political roles, particularly of indigenous women in our communities; and harmed the physical environment, plant and animal habitat, and human existence. These practices continue. This violence must stop.

• (1700)

LAWS respectfully asks the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to take the following recommended actions.

First, with regard to financial resources, advocate all-party support to provide adequate government funding for long-term sustainable core funding for indigenous women's organizations; funding for the creation of industry-wide and enforceable policies informed by women with lived experience, particularly in the extractive resource industry, and for women's advocacy NGOs to respect indigenous sovereignty and the safety of indigenous women and girls; and funding for more research studies, per the "Reclaiming Power and Place" report.

With regard to the second area, accountability, ensure that Canada complies with its obligations to respect, protect and fulfill women's equality rights and the human rights of indigenous peoples under domestic and international law through its UN universal periodic review and sustainable development goals reports as well as law and policy reform, and use GBA+ policy analysis to fund indigenous women's participation and include indigenous women in decision-making roles for environmental and socio-economic assessment reviews of extractive industry proposals.

The third area is implementation. For the TRC, the "Reclaiming Power and Place" report, the calls for justice, the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the government needs to ensure that this work is adequately funded in order for our communities to work towards implementing recommendations, calls to justice and calls to action.

Finally, with regard to reconciliation and restoration, the cost for implementing recommendations for justice and reconciliation and for the restoration of lands alienated from indigenous peoples should be covered by government and industry, which have reaped and continued to reap the profits from extractive resource industry projects.

The Liard Aboriginal Women's Society is a non-governmental organization. We've been around for 25 years. We know the lay of the land, and we're really here today to encourage you to take action to help us end violence in our own communities and to help us ensure that future generations aren't fighting the same fight in another 25 years from now.

Sógá sénlá'.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you for your expertise, Dr. Buffalo.

At this point, Ms. Young, you have the floor for up to five minutes.

Ms. Jill Young (Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Lethbridge and District): Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am Jill Young, the CEO of YWCA Lethbridge and District. I'm representing just some of the voices of my community in Lethbridge, Alberta.

The national scope of this crisis is staggering. At least one woman or girl is killed every two and a half days in Canada, most often by a male. Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to

be murdered or go missing than other women in Canada. In 2022 alone, 868 children were left without their mothers due to femicide.

Over four in 10 women have endured some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetimes, and nearly one-third of women over the age of 15 report experiencing sexual assault. That means if I look around at the women sitting here today on this committee, at least four of you have experienced some form of intimate partner violence.

These figures are haunting, and we are witnessing their impacts on the ground every day in Lethbridge.

Lethbridge has some of the highest rates of intimate partner violence—which is a form of gender-based violence—in Alberta, with Statistics Canada reporting a rate well above the national average in 2022. Harbour House, the emergency shelter for women and children fleeing violence and the only one in Lethbridge, experienced a 15% increase in crisis calls over the last year alone. We were able to shelter 400 individuals throughout the year, yet due to capacity constraints, 827 individuals were unable to be sheltered. At the current rate, we anticipate that number could be close to 1,000 individuals this year.

Our shelter is also seeing a 31% increase in children needing refuge. These children are escaping traumatic situations only to find limited resources for their recovery and stability.

Lethbridge faces a unique set of challenges that contributes to these elevated rates of intimate partner violence. As a regional hub for southern Alberta, Lethbridge serves a large, diverse and often underserved population, including many rural and indigenous communities with limited access to resources. This influx increases the demand on local services, often stretching our resources to the breaking point. Additionally, socio-economic issues like higher-than-average rates of poverty and addiction in Lethbridge add to the complexity.

Financial instability and substance misuse are well-documented risk factors for intimate partner violence, making it even more challenging to break the cycle of abuse in our community. The economic pressures exacerbated by inflation, lack of affordable housing and limited mental health services further strain the capacity of organizations like ours to address and prevent intimate partner violence effectively.

These local factors echo what we know nationally: Gender-based violence is complex, systemic issue deeply rooted in long-standing gender inequality. Femicide and gender-based violence are not inevitable and they are preventable. As a society, we have the power to prevent these tragedies if we commit to addressing their root causes through a multipronged, coordinated approach.

The national action plan to end gender-based violence can be an invaluable road map, but its success depends on action, collaboration and accountability from leaders at every level of government. The national action plan launched in 2022, yet we still see forms of gender-based violence on the rise, and specifically sexual assault.

This requires the entire system working together, meaning federal, provincial and municipal levels working alongside organizations like ours to ensure these services are comprehensive and accessible. We need sustained investment in emergency shelter capacity, mental health support, trauma-informed services, affordable housing and culturally responsive programs. We cannot address gender-based violence without addressing the economic and social vulnerabilities that put women and children at risk.

We know what the statistics tell us and we know the root causes. We have thousands of hours of research and hundreds of reports on this issue at our fingertips. What we need now is decisive, multi-faceted action that brings together all of us to implement these solutions with urgency, commitment and accountability.

● (1710)

We need to know that the road map we are using leads to a reality where safety, equity and dignity are the standard for all women in Canada.

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

Thank you to all witnesses. That concludes our opening remarks.

At this point, we will begin our rounds of questions. I will be noting the time and informing members and witnesses in the room and online when there is one minute left and then when there are 30 seconds left.

In addition to that, before we begin our questioning, I would like to acknowledge that Dr. Buffalo needs to excuse herself at 6:15 p.m. If you would like to pose any questions to her, you want to do that before 6:15 p.m.

At this point, I welcome MP Dancho. You have six minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for your excellent testimony.

I'm not a permanent member of this committee, and when I do come, there are some very heavy topics discussed here. Certainly this committee and the witnesses who come here deserve a lot of credit for their courage in bringing these issues forward, which, in my opinion, should be much more in the forefront of our political discussion than they are currently.

I have a number of questions for a number of you.

Madam Singh, thank you for your testimony. You asked at the end why abusers are only in jail for two days, two weeks or two years. I believe you said that they should be in jail for a lifetime, and that if they were, violence would be ended permanently. You also made the point, which I thought was quite a good point, that the violence lives for a lifetime with the woman who has been abused and her children. That was the sort of argument you made.

If you could design the justice system with women, victims and their children in mind, what specifically would you change about it? I know you have said that you would keep the abusers in jail forever. That's not necessarily an option—perhaps it is—but are there other things that you would do? Are there other things that you would do to fix the justice system?

Ms. Sunder Singh: The reason I mentioned that abusers need to be in jail for their lifetime is that they destroy the lives of family members, their wives. They beat them. They break their bodies, and when someone commits a crime, when they commit a murder, we put them in jail for life, but when women are hurt and their bodies are broken and the children are taken away or are permanently mentally damaged, we don't do anything about the abusers.

When the laws are strict, when we put the abusers away for life or for a very long time in jail, affecting their lives, the violence will be instantly reduced. That was the point I tried to make. Why are abusers put in jail for one day or two days, and then they're out? They are in jail for two weeks, and then they are out on bail again.

There should be no bail for the criminals, absolutely no bail for abusers who are hurting women and children.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, madam.

I have a similar question for Ms. Martine Jeanson.

Martine, you were here, I believe, in November 2023. I'll read your quote back to you. I apologize; you likely said it in French, but I'll read you the English translation, if that's all right.

You said:

Everyone knows that abusers are arrested and then released. You can see it on television and hear it on radio. So women are afraid to report their abusers and don't want to do so because once he is released, he will automatically return home.

I feel that this is a very powerful point, because women have to get the courage and do all the work to finally report and go through the whole rigamarole and then have him perhaps spend a few days in jail, as the lady right before you said. They go through all of that and then have him come home. I would imagine that they would be very upset with what just took place and that a lot of women and others would be concerned about that.

Can you elaborate on your point and on how you would design the justice system to solve that issue?

[Translation]

Ms. Martine Jeanson: Women are scared precisely because they know that, when a man is arrested after being reported and then asked to sign a recognizance under section 810 of the Criminal Code, he will be immediately released. He is not put in jail. Women know that. What happens then? The stories are all over the TV news: femicide, the youth protection branch steps in and takes the children away from their family, and so it goes.

In my view, what it always comes down to is the basic design of the system. A violent man never has just one victim. Even if he goes to jail, he'll get out and inflict violence on other victims. I firmly believe that violent men need specialized therapy for violent men. That is our only hope of changing things.

We have to address the behaviours of violent men and try to understand what they are rooted in. I'm not talking about narcissistic perverts because, as I've always said, you can never change someone with narcissistic perversion. However, men who grow up seeing impulsive behaviours can become impulsive. Most children who grow up in families that experience domestic violence become violent people. That cycle has to stop. All of these people need help. Women need to rebuild their lives. Men need help to deal with their violent behaviour. Children need help too.

As soon as the police are called in, the violent man should be put into a facility.

I want to thank centres for women. I always say how lucky we are to have them. What do we do about the men, though? If they are left to their own devices, if no one works with them, they are never going to change. Throughout the course of their lives, they will leave more and more victims in their wake. They will become more and more violent.

When you look at the history of every man who ends up killing a woman, you see that there were many victims along the way.

In my case, after I was left for dead, my attacker victimized seven other people.

• (1715)

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Maybe I'll be able to ask the rest of my questions in another round, because I had some follow-ups. Thank you both.

The Chair: MP Sidhu, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for sharing your insights with us.

My first question goes to Ms. Singh.

Ms. Singh, you shared Cindy's story. It was very touching. I just want to ask you a question.

There are various forms of gender-based violence, including emotional violence, physical violence and financial violence. What types of programs or initiatives are needed to support those individuals who are going through a tough time?

Ms. Sunder Singh: Ms. Sidhu, sometimes the emotional violence can be extremely severe, to the point that the abuser will mentally hurt women.

All kinds of abuse of women are criminal activities. There is no one criminal activity that can weigh heavier than the others. When the abuser is abusing his partner, they use all sorts of abuse. They use emotional, financial and physical abuse.

What we experience is that most of the women who come to the centre talk about the abusers being very charismatic, very polite. They are very social in the community. They have a good standing in the community. However, at home, they are abusing their partners. The partners are in a very precarious situation when they are in a social environment. They don't know how to explain to the community, because the community will not believe them when they say that they're being abused. Emotional abuse can be very dangerous. It can have a huge impact on a woman.

It's not just the physical, but the emotional and the financial. The financial issue is heavy because a woman cannot leave her home, if she has little children, if she is not financially stable. Most women who are financially stable because they have a good job can leave that relationship instantly, but otherwise financial abuse, the financial control by the abuser, keeps the woman at home for abuse.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

My next question goes to Ms. Young.

Ms. Young, you talked about a road map of a national action plan. We also heard a few times in the committee about the importance of providing full wraparound care for victims. Could you tell us more about wraparound services, whereby women can get everything at one stop? What do you think about that?

• (1720)

Ms. Jill Young: Absolutely, I can. I'm a huge proponent of wraparound services and a system of care.

Each individual we see at Harbour House brings in their own unique individual story and is at a different part in their journey. We need to identify what those services are and how we can help support them, because it's not a linear problem. We often see individuals who have experienced various forms of abuse, whether physical, financial or emotional. We need to be able to provide services that include mental health supports, financial literacy services and opportunities for them to get their ID cards and bank cards, or a bank account if they've never had one before. These are critical pieces to provide an individual with independence, which they may not have had before.

Quite often what we see in shelters is a siloed approach, and we need to expand that and have that collaborative wraparound approach so that we are able to address all of these different intricacies that are affecting these individuals.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

Many witnesses suggested to the committee that the offence of femicide should be added to the Criminal Code. Do you agree that the offence of femicide should be added to the Criminal Code?

Ms. Jill Young: Yes, I do agree, 100%, that it needs to be added to the Criminal Code to actually identify what these crimes are and how they're happening. Without naming it, we can't address it.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

Madam Singh, do you agree with that?

Ms. Sunder Singh: I also agree with that.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Do any witnesses want to talk about that?

Ms. Sunder Singh: Are you addressing me, Ms. Sidhu?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Any witness can speak about that.

Do you have any comments, Dr. Buffalo?

Dr. Amanda Buffalo: I agree that it should be part of the Criminal Code and, as Madam Young stated, language is important, and we can't address things when we don't know what we're addressing. I would proffer for the committee that language is important in the way that we prosecute or seek justice as well.

In the court system now, violence gets mutualized in the language. We have a lot of work to do around training our justice, legal and punitive systems around clear and clean language that doesn't mutualize the violence or that doesn't put the responsibility of the actions of the perpetrator onto the victim. That, I think, is really an important piece of it.

That means talking about who did what to whom, and not letting "Jeff hit Jill"—I'm sorry, Jill—get changed in the court to, "Jill was hit," and suddenly Jeff is gone, off in the night, and it's just Jill here having to deal with this.

I think that's a really important piece of it. As much as trauma-informed models brought us to where we are in this discussion, I think we need to move to violence-informed models that talk about who does what to whom, and we need to have dignity-driven practices that are committed to upholding the dignity of the victims and the survivors of violence.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

We now go to Ms. Larouche for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today to think about how we can reduce, if not eliminate, femicides. In short, we are looking for solutions.

My first questions are for the representatives of F d ration des maisons d'h bergement pour femmes, so Ms. St-Pierre Gaudreault or Ms. Monastesse can answer.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Monastesse talked about what I see as crosscutting responsibilities. In other words, a number of sectors come into play in relation to femicides. That is why it is important to find ways to bring those sectors together, not just health and justice, but also the social system and safety net, taking into account things like the lack of housing. Basically, femicide is an issue that requires a broader response, and so, the discussion needs to focus on a number of sectors.

That was the approach taken by the panel of experts responsible for the Quebec report "*Reb tir la confiance*". The report focuses on supports for victims and their access to justice, and the recommendations address a number of sectors.

Would you like to comment on the need to address femicide at a broader level?

• (1725)

Ms. Manon Monastesse: You are right. A comprehensive approach is necessary, one that takes into account every aspect of these women's lives and quality of life. It has to address the health and social sectors as much as it does the justice system. An integrated response that brings together all sectors is needed to ensure women's safety.

The court system has been a frequent topic of discussion. The current court response is not good enough. It doesn't put victims at the centre of the judicial process. We have seen that violence against women and its impact on women and their children are poorly understood because justice system stakeholders do not have the necessary training.

It's the same for the health sector. Health professionals are not good at identifying the effects of violence against women. When women who have suffered injuries go to the hospital, in very few cases is violence identified as the cause. There again, it comes down to a lack of training.

Holes in the social safety net are also to blame. Women's shelters should not be the only organizations providing victims with the full range of supports they need. The response has to be coordinated and integrated. Many of the women who turn to us think twice about it. When they are thinking about leaving their violent partner, they wonder what will happen to them once they leave the shelter. It's also important not to overlook second-stage housing, where women can stay for three to five years as they rebuild their lives. Regardless, women wonder what they're going to do when they leave the shelter. Will they be able to afford a place to live? Will they find a good school for their kids? Will they find a new job? As we all know, women who leave abusive situations—whether it's domestic violence or another form of abuse—have to rebuild their lives from scratch. Unfortunately, some women choose to stay with their partner because society doesn't offer them the full range of supports they need.

How society responds to men with violent behaviours is equally important. Again, this is not limited to situations involving domestic violence. It includes exploitation rings, sexual assault, family violence, violence against parents at the hands of their children. It covers all the forms of violence that have been raised, ranging from financial abuse and verbal abuse to sexual violence.

That is why it is so important to make coercive control a crime. As we all know, violence offences in the Criminal Code are based solely on physical violence. Some women experience total coercive control, which has psychological and physical effects, but it does not necessarily constitute a crime. That is a major issue.

How are we dealing with violent men?

One of the problems we are seeing in Canada, at least in Quebec, is that the programs for these men are inadequate. Oftentimes, they don't focus on the need to hold these men accountable for their violent behaviours.

That explains a lot of the comments we hear. "Well, yes, he was violent towards his partner, but he's still a good father." However, all the research shows that that is completely false: violence against women and violence against children go hand in hand. Regardless, the prevailing attitude is such that fathers are able to get custody of the children under the civil law system.

• (1730)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Gazan, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, and thank you to all the witnesses. It was excellent testimony today. I wish I had lots of time to ask questions.

My first question is for Amanda Buffalo.

You spoke about policing and the issues around resource extraction. We actually did a study in this committee on the connection between resource extraction and increased violence against indigenous women and girls, but I want to speak about the policing. You said that with regard to the RCMP, there are many reports of "misogyny, racism and sexualized violence".

I'm asking this question because there's this kind of tough-on-crime approach to dealing with gender-based violence, but when it comes specifically to indigenous women, the very systems that are supposed to protect us perpetrate violence against us.

What would be an alternative to tough on crime and traditional forms of policing in order to police safety?

Dr. Amanda Buffalo: I'll begin answering that by saying that I'm alive and my sister and my mothers are alive because of other women in our community being really committed to helping women escape violent situations. There's so much that's tied to that in every community.

These systems weren't made to keep women safe. If you think about when we try a case in a public court, you get a public prosecutor who represents the general safety of the public, and that's how they determine what's going to be prosecuted and what is not. Remember that women were not part of the public until 1929. The Criminal Code goes back a lot farther than that. The law has never really been adjusted to include women insofar as prosecutions or the way in which we do that work.

One thing we've been talking a lot about up north is having lawyers for the victims in the same way that a perpetrator gets a free lawyer who is publicly funded. I mean, perpetrators get lawyers twice. They get the public interest lawyer and then they get their defence lawyer. What that tells us, even without saying it, is that women are actually guilty until proven innocent by that process. The burden of proof is on them.

When we think about all of the little ways that we absent women from these systems and absent them having voice, and then tell them to go to a particular service that was actually designed to keep their voice down or to corral them—particularly for indigenous women, to clear them from the land—and that's supposed to be where we go for safety, it doesn't make sense in my brain, my heart or any part of my being. The first place I'm going to go and the first place my mom always took me was auntie's house.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you very much. More support for women supporting other women is very clear.

I wanted to move to Madame Jeanson on the same question.

You were talking about helping violent men. I've done some work with jails. I've been trained to teach in jails, actually. One thing that I noticed when working in the jails is that they're very violent. Punishing violent men in anti-social, violent environments doesn't make sense to me, in terms of eradicating violence.

You talked about how we help violent men. You said that we need homes for violent men, centres where they can get long-term treatment and care.

I'm wondering if you could provide more details about that.

[Translation]

Ms. Martine Jeanson: I sincerely believe that we need to open centres for violent men. I'm not talking about substance abuse treatment centres. I'm talking about real therapy centres. Our organization, La Maison des Guerrières, works with men who have violent and impulsive behaviours. As Ms. Monastesse said, programs or workshops provided by Paix and other such organizations do not constitute real therapy. It's a group of guys sitting down having a good time for an hour. What I do when I work with men is bring them face to face with their problems. They are intensive sessions.

I believe these men need the support of specialists. We have therapy programs in which specialists help men by giving them the tools they need to deal with substance abuse issues. Similarly, we need homes for violent men. As soon as police are called in to respond to a situation involving a violent man, he should be sent to a centre where experts could assess the level of danger he poses. If he's found to be very dangerous, for instance, the experts could decide that the case had to be referred back to the court and that the man had to be kept under surveillance.

The approach has to be intensive. These men don't have the right tools. The only tool they have is anger. They need to learn other tools, so they can cope with jealousy and other emotions properly, so they can understand why they react the way they do. I can speak to the results we've seen with the men we have worked with. I repeat, however, that they can't be men with narcissistic perversion. I am talking about men who are impulsive. Some of these men were sexually assaulted. Some experienced violence first-hand, having been abused by their parents or watched their mother be beaten. Violence is the only thing they know, so they behave violently in their own intimate relationships. It is society's job to educate them.

Violence prevention needs to happen in schools as well. There isn't—

• (1735)

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm out of time.

We need to eradicate violence in non-violent ways on a case-by-case basis. Is that right?

[Translation]

Ms. Martine Jeanson: That's right.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

The second round begins now.

Anna—MP Roberts—you have the floor for five minutes.

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

I want to thank all of the witnesses for your stories. You're strong women for being able to come here and talk to us. I commend all of you.

I'd like to also recognize Sunder Singh. I know the amazing work that you do with women. I also know that you've won the Mayor's Community Safety Award as well as the Ministry of the Attorney

General's Victim Services Award of Distinction. That's a huge honour, but the honour I have is knowing that you are there fighting for women.

One of the things that you said about the sentencing of men really hit a chord with me. We had a situation in Vaughan—and I know that you're aware of it—of a heart surgeon who was presented with divorce papers by his wife, who was also a physician. He decided to kill her. She had been speaking to her friends about the abuse that she had experienced with this man.

At the end of the day, we can take that individual, hopefully.... I like the idea of maybe removing the man and putting them in a home and getting them help and not always blaming the woman.

Would you say, Sunder—Ms. Singh—that sometimes men cannot be rehabilitated?

Ms. Sunder Singh: There is a possibility. In many cases, they cannot be.

I have witnessed a PAR program where we had approximately 15 men in a room who were transformed by the program, and it worked extremely well.

You absolutely cannot do anything about some mental cases and you have to put them in jail for the rest of their lives. If we don't, these partners—females—will move away from them, but these men will find other partners to abuse. The cycle will go on and on, so it's just not one woman who is victimized; there are other women who are also victimized because of this person and because of his mental state.

In many—

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I'm sorry to interrupt, Ms. Singh. Would you say that the practice of catch and release has to be revisited because it doesn't protect women?

• (1740)

Ms. Sunder Singh: Catch and release is not something that I will recommend. It's not my recommendation. A person who is violently hurting his partner should be put in jail for a very long time so that it affects his life and he learns what he has done wrong.

One thing that did work, MP Roberts, in India is a system in the jails called *vipassana*. It's a very strong therapy that strong criminals are given, and it brings about amazing changes in these criminals. It's a great therapy. A partnership, the PAR program, is also very, very good.

What I'm trying to say is that these criminals should not be given bail. Once they are put in jail, they have to go through lifetime or full-time mental counselling, and they require some sort of serious therapies to impact their mental state.

There are many, many criminals who have done horrible things. They are in jail. You can't change them. A majority of them can't be, but we have to use proper therapy. They still have to be in jail to be transformed. We cannot let them out, because if the law is soft, then these criminals will continue doing what they're doing, but if the law is changed and becomes stricter, you will see a reduction in domestic violence. You will see reduction in assault.

Sexual assault is so very common in this country that we can't even imagine. If you scratch somebody's life story, you will definitely find that there was some sort of sexual assault going on. Why is it going on—why, in this country? Why are the women not safe in this country?

The Chair: Thank you.

At this point, we have MP Lambropoulos.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

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

I want to begin by thanking all of our witnesses for being here today. It is not easy, and we really appreciate your input on this study. Again, thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to take a closer look at the therapy or programs currently available to violent men, to see how we could change them. This is something many witnesses have brought up, including the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes représentatives.

You said that the programs currently available do not focus on holding men accountable for their violent behaviour. What do they focus on? How do we change the programs so that they are suitable?

I'd like to hear what the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes représentatives have to say, followed by Ms. Jeanson.

Ms. Julie St-Pierre Gaudreault (Policy Issues Advisor, Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes): One of the most common problems, in our view, is that the programs don't have to adhere to a particular set of standards, as Ms. Monastesse was describing. What's more, there is no real research showing that the way these programs are being delivered is producing the desired effect among the violent men going through the programs.

As was mentioned, the programs should focus on holding the abuser accountable. In some cases, though, they take the form of discussion groups or therapy without specific parameters. The programs do not have to have a minimum duration or meet specific criteria. They may not necessarily work on violence prevention with participants. That is one solution, but prevention efforts also need to target young people. With the rise of misogyny and cyber-violence on social media, it's important to promote positive masculinity. We need to prevent violence instead of trying to do something once it's too late.

I'm not sure whether Ms. Monastesse has anything to add.

• (1745)

Ms. Manon Monastesse: Yes.

It's important to have a clear framework and objectives for the violent men who have to take the programs. Ontario currently has a legislative framework, a set of standards. If the service providers that work with these violent men do not adhere to the framework, they lose their funding.

In Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, the programs are all over the map. It could be behaviour therapy or a program with some sort of psychological component, but that's not the real problem. The real problem is that men with violent behaviours need to take accountability for their actions. They need to understand that violence is a choice. It's not being hot-tempered, it's not about their past. It is worth noting that countless men make the choice not to use violence in their own lives, despite experiencing tremendous violence growing up. Many studies prove that violence isn't necessarily passed on from one generation to the next.

The only program that works is one that focuses on holding abusers accountable for their behaviour, one that gets abusers to understand that violent behaviour is based on—

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Sorry to cut you off, Ms. Monastesse, but I have just a minute left.

Ms. Manon Monastesse: Okay.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Sorry, Ms. Jeanson, but I'd like to use my remaining minute to ask Ms. Young a question.

[*English*]

You said these things are preventable and that we need to address the root causes. Can you go over what those root causes are, in your opinion, and what we should be focusing on in order to prevent this, rather than putting a band-aid on an issue that is clearly rampant?

Ms. Jill Young: We need to start with prevention. It starts when individuals are young, which is a key aspect to not responding but preventing. We need to instill skills—life skills, healthy relationships, empowerment to girls and to boys—so that they understand when they are young and so that we can eliminate this at an earlier age, rather than responding after the fact when it has happened. We need to focus on those skills and really build on programs that are going to support prevention of gender-based violence.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

MP Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to use my second turn to continue the discussion with Ms. St-Pierre Gaudreault and Ms. Monastesse.

You said this in your opening remarks and you also explained it when you were answering questions. We need to look at femicide not just through a domestic violence lens, but also through other lenses. Thank you for opening our eyes to that. Ultimately, it comes back to the power imbalance between men and women. You can elaborate on that if you like.

Otherwise, could you give us more information on something you touched on in one of your answers, online violence? It's a matter that falls under federal jurisdiction, since it has to be addressed through the Criminal Code. We need to think about where we draw the line on hateful comments that fuel misogyny. At a certain point, the question has to be asked: When do we bring the law into it and hold people responsible under the Criminal Code for what they say online, and use their comments as evidence? *Backlash: Misogyny in the Digital Age* and other such documentaries do a good job of showing that police don't have the same tools at their disposal to deal with online violence.

Ms. Manon Monastesse: You're absolutely right. It is extremely worrisome.

Right now, we are seeing a backlash against women and greater tolerance in society for violent language. Legislation is certainly needed to address that because it's totally unacceptable. It is pretty bad when society tolerates politicians saying racist, sexist and extremely violent things about women. It is totally unacceptable. If Canada wants to do something about violence against women, it has to send the message that it has zero tolerance for violence against women.

• (1750)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. St-Pierre Gaudreault, I saw you nodding your head. I'll give you the 15 seconds I have left to let you speak.

Ms. Julie St-Pierre Gaudreault: I completely agree. It's important to understand that technology-based online violence can transform into real-life violence. It can lead to physical violence, even femicide. That can start online.

We need to find a way to take action at the source, as soon as a complaint is made about an act of online violence, harassment or misogyny. We have to find a way to limit the use of aliases so that we can track down the perpetrators of violence.

It can start with online violence, which should never be trivialized.

[English]

The Chair: Excellent.

MP Gazan, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Chair.

You said prevention. One thing that I've really pushed for since being elected is to push forward bills to tackle the roots of gender-based violence. Guaranteed livable basic income was voted against.

Ms. Young, you said affordable housing and rent geared to income. I don't feel that we'll tackle gender-based violence unless we deal with human rights matters.

Madame Buffalo, you spoke about human rights violations perpetrated by the state against indigenous women on lands, territories and resources.

I'm wondering if you could both briefly respond to that.

Ms. Jill Young: Can you repeat the question?

Ms. Leah Gazan: For prevention, do you agree that we need those things in order to deal with gender-based violence head-on, as human rights matters?

Ms. Jill Young: Prevention and human rights are essential core pieces in having a significant impact on ending gender-based violence.

Given the dollars that are attached to responding after the fact with our shelters and our second stage, if we were able to invest such a significant amount of money on the prevention side by providing individuals with those necessary, basic needs and the education around it, we could really start to have a financial impact, as well, on gender-based violence.

Ms. Leah Gazan: You spoke about one of the roots being gender inequality and inequities.

Ms. Jill Young: Yes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madame Buffalo, would you comment?

Dr. Amanda Buffalo: I think that sometimes we get into this back-and-forth of the chicken and the egg. It's really important to remember that violence is actually the root cause of all of those inequities. It's not the other way around. It's not that the inequity exists, and then violence can happen; it's that violence ensures that those inequities exist. I think we need to start thinking about it like that. When we start thinking about it and addressing it like that, we can look at it like....

Violence is deliberate. It is always a choice. You can see it; when a woman is beaten, it's usually not in the places that you can see. It's unilateral. Somebody makes a decision to do it to somebody else, and then they do it, and it's social. We're all part of that.

We have an opportunity to address those three things in a variety of ways, particularly with the law. If we start treating violence as the crime that it actually is, I think that we also have a different opportunity to address all of these other social ills that come as a result of one person's choice to use violence against another.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

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

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for making themselves available today.

Ms. Jeanson, you appeared before the committee as part of another study. It was actually for the study of a bill, but it still involved violence against women, unfortunately.

You said that your partner left you for dead 30 years ago. If I understood correctly, he later claimed seven other victims.

What happened between each of the offences? How did the justice system respond? Obviously, it didn't get the memo.

• (1755)

Ms. Martine Jeanson: He simply had to sign peace bonds under section 810 of the Criminal Code. When I was writing my book along with a colleague, we pulled up my ex's criminal record. That's when we saw that there had been seven procedures under section 810 of the Criminal Code.

After he hurt me, he hurt another woman just as badly. She has twins. We have a connection now as victims. She managed to escape before she went through what I did, but she was beaten. He wasn't convicted in court for that either. His victimization of women is ongoing.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: This is someone who brazenly reoffends, and the system has failed to stop him or hold him accountable.

Ms. Martine Jeanson: That's correct.

That's why I was talking earlier about therapy with experts. They are able to determine whether a man is a narcissistic pervert and will never change.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I agree with you that in the case of narcissistic perverts, it's a little more complicated.

Ms. Monastesse, you are no doubt familiar with the Hommes Québec network, a Quebec organization. Other organizations have undertaken a similar mission. In my neck of the woods, Beauce, there is an organization called Partage au Masculin. When I was hosting a public affairs radio show 30 or 40 years ago, I invited men to speak on-air. Even back then, we were starting to talk about men and asking them to express themselves. We learned a little more about their reality.

I may be an eternal optimist, but I would like to think that something can be done.

To your knowledge, what is happening in our schools? I ask because the committee did a study on intimate partner violence, and it seems that acting early, talking not just to men but also to young boys, is linked to success.

Are we doing enough outreach in schools?

Ms. Manon Monastesse: Yes, prevention is the core of outreach. Even shelters do outreach in schools, although mainly in high schools owing to lack of resources. I think it's fair to say that prevention is the least funded component. However, it is the one that should be emphasized.

Our outreach work involves explaining what a healthy relationship between intimate partners looks like. Every time, young women share their experiences with us. We work with girls who tell us they need our services.

Prevention is central to the solution. Let's not forget that in shelters, including those in our network, women have their children with them, 50% of whom are young boys. We also do work with them, since they have witnessed violence. There are programs for that.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: You are familiar with this work and you know what you are doing. How do you measure the success of your outreach with these children? Your goal is for these young boys to develop positive masculinity and become full-fledged citizens who respect women. Do you feel that many of them pull through as a result of your outreach? How successful do you think your approach is for how they later behave?

Ms. Manon Monastesse: It's hard to say, because emergency shelter stays are shorter.

That said, studies have been conducted on the issue of children who have been exposed to domestic violence. For example, Simon Lapierre from the University of Ottawa has conducted a number of studies on the consequences of domestic violence on young children. In his research, he gave voice to children. It's interesting how, as survivors, they understand what violence is. As we have made very clear, being violent is a choice. Studies tend to show that experiencing violence at a young age doesn't doom these children. They don't necessarily become abusive men.

• (1800)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Next, we have MP Serré.

You have the floor for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I, too, would like to give my heartfelt thanks to the witnesses. They shared their observations on an extremely difficult issue. Their expertise and recommendations will help us a great deal. I hope that many judges, Crown attorneys and justices of the peace have listened to the testimony we've heard over the past few weeks. Changes are urgently needed, because the situation is dire.

I would like to address Ms. Monastesse, Ms. St-Pierre Gaudreault and Ms. Jeanson. I'm going to continue along the same lines as my colleague Dominique Vien in terms of support. The situation is genuinely dire when it comes to prevention services and the measures that need to be put in place to help men.

In no way do I want to diminish the importance of women's shelter services and the support that must be provided to women. It is very important. That said, the only solution for men right now seems to be sending them to prison. We know that doesn't work. In many cases, they don't even go to prison.

Ms. Monastesse, you said that Ontario had put a framework in place. Would you be able to send any materials on that framework to the committee? Should we consider applying such a framework across the country?

Ms. Manon Monastesse: Yes, absolutely.

In terms of accountability, there is even a program for fathers who engage in violent behaviour. It's called the Caring Dads program. It's very effective, because it really focuses on accountability and how violent behaviour impacts children. The goal of the program is to change fathers' parenting skills so that they become responsible, non-violent fathers.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you for mentioning the issue of children. I think Crown prosecutors are not adequately supporting children. That should be studied.

Ms. Jeanson, you talked a lot about therapy for men. Do you have any other specific recommendations for the federal government?

As you know, the national action plan to end gender-based violence, which was developed by the federal government and signed by all 10 provinces and three territories, will be reported on in December. Under the plan, 25% of the funding allocated, a total of \$125 million, must be spent on prevention.

Do you think treatment centres for men should be tried out?

Ms. Martine Jeanson: I say yes, absolutely. We teach them accountability, as Ms. Monastesse said, but we also listen to what they have experienced to understand the why and how.

Prevention in schools is also important. Young people today are not educated about violence, and they see a lot of it around them. They see people in street gangs, for example. In many cases, people are violent out of fear; violence is a self-defence mechanism. Often, as they grow up, young people adopt violent behaviours to look cool, but these are not the right tools. I believe that, by building people's self-esteem, we free them from racism, aggression and many other problems. When we build strong human beings, they don't need to destroy others.

We have to work on both fronts.

However, according to the research I've done everywhere, there are currently no therapies available to men. I'm not talking about little workshops once a week. I'm talking about therapy that men have to undergo in closed custody. Believe me, if you put a bunch of violent men together, their behaviours will come out. Their egos and control issues will emerge, among other things, and the people there will be able to work on those behaviours. I still think that's the best way to go.

Mr. Marc Serré: Ms. Jeanson, I have about 45 seconds left and I would like to address another aspect.

Personally, I am a hunter. I have a licence for possession and acquisition of firearms, and I have guns at home.

Based on your experience, do you think guns that are stored at home are a problem, given that, in a considerable number of cases, guns are the weapons used against women?

Ms. Martine Jeanson: There is no doubt about that. However, whether with a gun or a knife, a man who wants to kill someone will find a way to do so.

• (1805)

Ms. Manon Monastesse: I would say that it is actually a problem. Since the firearms registry was eliminated in the country, we have seen an increase in gun use. Of course, if we leave—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Dancho, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you again to the witnesses for their testimony.

I appreciate the commentary from members of Parliament today and the responses that we're getting.

I do agree—and we've heard this from witnesses on this study and on others—that there needs to be a lot of focus put on rehabilitation and therapy. I very much agree that if we're going to break a cycle of violence, we certainly need those supports, and they are severely lacking.

I believe Ms. Gazan mentioned that penitentiaries are, in essence.... Excuse my language, but it's the best way I can describe what I've seen: They can be hellholes. They are very difficult places to be, and that stays with you for the rest of the day after you visit them.

What I struggle with is the idea of perpetual abusers. I believe it was Ms. Jeanson who mentioned that the man who abused her abused 10 women. We know that there are perpetual child sex abusers. I personally have a very difficult time believing that it is okay in a society to send those individuals directly to receive therapy. They should go spend some time in hell for a few years, in my opinion. Certainly the worst of the worst deserve that.

What I see happening in this country, through various criminal justice bills, is a weakening of that idea. The justice system for victims doesn't seem to be the priority. Sometimes very bad men who do vile things to many women and children need to go to jail, and that doesn't seem to be necessarily the default anymore in some cases. It's very upsetting to open a paper and see that some man who sexually abused many children is out after five years. I think that's a grave injustice to victims, and they live with that for a number of years.

I just wanted to mention that and get the perspective of Ms. Singh.

Do you have any thoughts to add to that, Ms. Singh?

Ms. Sunder Singh: My mind is racing. There's so much that I want to talk about.

Yesterday, we had to see a case of a young child who had been sexually abused by the father. She is now six years old. The mother was abused by her husband. She saw the child naked on the bed and saw him with only his underwear on, and he beat her up when she witnessed it.

Anyway, she's now separated and she has the six-year-old child with her now. She is fighting like hell to keep the child. He has hired a private lawyer. He can afford it, but she was financially abused, so she can't afford a lawyer. This lawyer is actively fighting for the custody of this six-year-old girl who will end up with the father. She's panicking and she's just talking non-stop and is completely emotionally disturbed that that child will be taken away from her. What do you do in a case like that?

We've tried to address the preventive measures and what we need to do. School education is so very important, but people who are immigrants and newcomers are coming, and they're bringing their culture with them, and the children are affected and the women are affected.

This case yesterday is not the only one that we've seen. We've seen cases before as well when the child has been sexually abused, and the child is talking. She's saying on the video, "This is what dad did to me." When I call the police, the police have closed the file because they're saying there's no evidence. Good Lord! You know, this woman is—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I just wanted to add to what you're saying.

I actually recently visited a centre in Manitoba called the Toba Centre, and it specializes in exactly what you're talking about. They do wraparound services for children who have been abused, particularly child victims of sexual abuse. They bring together... Actually, there's been a discussion today about how silos between police and social services and shelters are really a problem. This centre really acts as the hub to bring in police, who often don't necessarily have the training on how to deal with a child who's young and can perhaps barely talk about or barely even understand what's happened to them. It's just a phenomenally safe place for children who have seen things that no one deserves to see.

To your point, it's just that those resources for families are severely lacking. The Toba Centre, for example, follows that child through the process to protect them from having to repeat their story over and over to people who are not necessarily trained to deal with this.

Anyway, I just wanted to mention that because I agree that there's a need for them.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you, Raquel. Unfortunately, I don't have an opportunity to provide any space.

MP Damoff, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

Dr. Buffalo, I know you have to leave in a couple of minutes, so I'm going to start with you.

You mentioned 86% of femicides are indigenous in Yukon. Is that right?

Dr. Amanda Buffalo: It was just in that seven-year period. Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: One thing we hear about a lot is throwing people into jail. I can recall a case—and it wasn't in Yukon, but I believe in Nunavut—of an indigenous woman who called the police because she was being abused, and she was also arrested because she was breaching probation because she'd been drinking.

Then there was another situation of an indigenous woman who went to the police to report sexual assault. The judge was worried about her showing up for trial, so he put her in jail, and she ended up having to share a van with the accused to go to court.

How do we ensure that indigenous women who may be worried about being arrested for something like a breach of probation feel safe calling the police?

Dr. Amanda Buffalo: I do have to leave soon, and that's a long answer.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Listen, do you know what? If it's a longer answer than you have time for, you can send in something in writing, if you don't mind, and then we can include it.

Dr. Amanda Buffalo: I do want to touch on it, because it happens all the time, and it happens particularly in communities that are small, northern, rural, isolated, remote and indigenous.

It's a lack of resources. It's because we don't have enough bodies in the community. We keep getting money for program dollars, but then the program dollars dry up, and we go from having eight people to one person, so there aren't more people in the community to be able to do that kind of support. Then continuity becomes really important when we're trying to address these issues in smaller communities.

You said something about this idea of putting somebody in jail and the policing of indigenous women's bodies. I do also want to speak to that. We know that indigenous women are more policed than other people, more than indigenous people in general are in Canada. One of the things I'll offer before I have to leave is that there's been a lot of talk about punishment and throwing people in jail and what that looks like.

Punishment and accountability are two different concepts. One really invites the opportunity for someone to be accountable and rehabilitate their life, and the other just says that they're a horrible person who gets thrown away. This kind of culture of disposability isn't working either way. It's not working for any of us—men, women, any of our children, any of the future generations.

Instead of punishing, we need to rethink ways to invite accountability into our conversations so that people can take that step to rehabilitation and make the changes in their own world and in the way that they're choosing to treat other people.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Ms. Young, thank you so much for being here. You were talking about how you have the highest rate of—I can't remember—was it femicides in Alberta?

Ms. Jill Young: It was intimate partner violence.

Ms. Pam Damoff: It was intimate partner violence.

For how many women coming into your shelter has a firearm been used as a threat or been involved in that intimate partner violence?

Ms. Jill Young: I don't have the direct statistics on those cases specifically, but what we see in Lethbridge is a combination of both rural and urban dynamics. We are surrounded by a huge farming community where firearms are available widely through that farming community. We have stigma that is absolutely there.

It's a smaller community. We're about 100,000 people. Everybody knows your name. We have those pieces. When it comes to isolation, even if those guns aren't specifically used on them in a form of violence, there's still the threat of violence. I think that's also really important, because that is a psychological threat that is there. It's very impactful on the individual in making that decision on whether they need to leave or have the capacity to leave.

• (1815)

Ms. Pam Damoff: The reason I asked is that when the Lethbridge YWCA appeared at the status of women committee in 2018, after the meeting, I actually asked them about that. They said exactly what you did about firearms being used as threats, either against them or the children or companion animals, and so the women were hesitant to leave. They told a horrific story about some kids who reacted to a “bang” thinking that it was a firearm going off.

Anyway, thank you, and thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today.

The Chair: That's excellent.

MP Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

For my last turn, I will start with you, Ms. St-Pierre Gaudreault and Ms. Monastesse.

You touched on the alignment between what is being done in Quebec and what is called for in the national action plan to end gender-based violence. I imagine you were also talking about aligning the measures taken by the three levels of government and all stakeholders.

Very soon, I will be sitting down with the new person in charge of community services at the Granby police department, who will have to deal with cases involving crimes against women. What questions should I ask that person, with a view to aligning everything that is being done?

Ms. Manon Monastesse: Are you talking about alignment between the federal and provincial measures?

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: There are also municipal police forces on the ground. We forget that the alignment has to include them as well, and not just the federal government and Quebec.

Ms. Manon Monastesse: Yes.

In Quebec, there is a guide for police practices and how to intervene in cases of domestic or family violence or sexual assault. There has to be alignment because, unfortunately, while there is a guide in place, not all police officers follow it. That is already a fundamental problem.

That said, we have the Association des directeurs de police du Québec and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. Police practices need to be harmonized at all levels. As you say, that applies to the municipal level, in addition to the provincial and federal levels. Police practices need to be aligned, especially since the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has already created a guide on police intervention in this area.

That's what the whole alignment issue is about. We need to harmonize police practices as well as other ones.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. St-Pierre Gaudreault, do you have anything to add? There are 30 seconds left.

Ms. Julie St-Pierre Gaudreault: My first instinct is to give you an example. We have colleagues at the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale who provide training to police officers, particularly on ways to recognize coercive control and the different forms of violence, but also on the mechanisms in place to protect women. These approaches can be promoted, and the rest of Canada can learn from them so that training is offered everywhere.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Next I would like to welcome Leah Gazan.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

I have a question for Madame Monastesse.

You said that the data collection that's done by Statistics Canada is not effective. I want to ask you what recommendations you have for changing it in a way that you feel would be more effective.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Monastesse: The problem we see with the methodology used by Statistics Canada is that it is based on self-reporting. In other words, when Statistics Canada employees call people to answer a survey, they ask them if they are victims of violence, whether they are men or women. Things like coercive control are not taken into account in the criteria. We end up with matching data indicating that the number of victims of violence is the same among men and women, which is totally absurd.

Therefore, we need a methodology that takes into account the seriousness of the acts committed against women. Being a victim of verbal abuse is not the same as being a victim of coercive control, for example. However, Statistics Canada doesn't make a distinction as to the seriousness of the acts of violence that are perpetrated. If the woman says she is a victim of violence and the man says he is as well, the information is treated the same in both cases.

• (1820)

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

My last question is for Jill Young.

You said that resources are at a breaking point. What that says to me is that there are still not enough resources to deal with the level of crisis. Many municipalities have labelled it an epidemic of violence. Can you expand on that? What do you need in terms of resources?

Ms. Jill Young: We need a very targeted, collaborative approach that includes sustainable funding.

Quite often, the analogy that I use—and it has been used by other community organizations within Lethbridge—has been that, quite often, we are trying to make the best decision for the clients we see, the victims and the survivors, with one hand tied behind our back, and that is because of the options that are available. We want to be able to provide to that individual a suitable home, mental health resources or physicians, and we don't have those options, so it continues.

Yes, funding is a huge part of it, but it is not the only piece. We need to be doing this collaboratively and be very aligned. What we see in this system is that the funding and how we collaborate really vary by community. That makes a difference for those survivors.

The Chair: Thank you.

In the third round we have two slots left for both a Conservative Party member and a Liberal Party member, generally for five minutes each. I want you to do four minutes each, just because we started at 4:36 and we're going to end at 6:36.

We start with Anna. You have the floor for four minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you again to all the witnesses. I can't believe how wonderful and how brave you all are.

I'm going to ask my question to Madame Jeanson.

You told a story of a woman whose abuser violated his conditions 28 times. Based on your vast experience with many men who are not able to be rehabilitated, what is your thought on the catch-and-release policy, and how has it not assisted in preventing violence against women?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Martine Jeanson: The catch-and-release policy makes it possible for men to kill women. There's absolutely nothing protecting us.

In my case, 30 years ago, I called the police about my abusive partner at least 20 times. All the police reports about it are there. The police even asked me questions right in front of him.

When women are in the presence of their abuser, they're afraid to answer officers' questions because they know the police will arrest their abuser and then let him go. That can put a woman's life in even more danger. The man gets even madder at her because the police have intervened. Once he's released, he gets a hundred times crazier. That's why women no longer want to call the police. Just calling the police puts women's lives at even greater risk. I don't like saying that, but that's how it is. Quite frankly, it's the fact that the man is subsequently released that puts the lives of women at even greater risk.

[*English*]

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you very much.

I want to go back to Mrs. Singh.

I spoke to a few police officers who are very committed to protecting women, but what they keep telling me, especially in York Region, where recently a report came out that murders are up 67%—which scares me a lot—is that their hands are tied because they do the arrests, but then they can't keep them behind bars. Would you say to the police officers that...? How would you encourage them to continue to protect women when the law's not on their side?

Ms. Sunder Singh: We have experienced quite a few times that the police officers have said, "The file is closed because there's no evidence, and we are completely helpless. Our hands are tied." When the case goes to the police and to the court, the police tell us not to intervene. We can provide emotional support to the women, but other than that, we cannot do anything. It becomes a legal case, and there's nothing we can do.

I understand that the police are feeling helpless as well. They can do only so much, but it is the law that is soft, that ties the hands of the police, and they cannot do anything. Laws need to change. They need to become stricter, and authority has to be given to the police so that they are able to handle domestic violence cases.

Training for the police officers, judges and child protection agencies should become mandatory. They need to understand the emotional conditions of the women when they are abused. They need to understand deeply what the women go through and the impact of taking the children or threatening to take the child away from the mother at the same time as she's being abused. They need to understand that.

The emotional condition of the woman may make it appear from the outside that she's mentally unstable, but she's not. A mother cannot tolerate seeing her child being taken away, especially when she's beaten up at home, so they need to be very sensitive to that.

• (1825)

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Hepfner, you have the floor for four minutes.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses for this testimony.

Unfortunately, Dr. Buffalo is no longer here, but I want to go back to something she said that really piqued my interest.

She mentioned having a lawyer, paid for by the state, in court for the victim. We know that we have court support services for victims, but we heard at this committee that they don't always offer the type of support that victims need. If we had a lawyer paid for by the state, who is there to argue for the victim and the safety of the victim, do we think that would make a big difference?

I will start with you, Ms. Young.

Ms. Jill Young: Actually, at YWCA we have an individual who helps our clients, our survivors and our victims navigate the legal system. It's something that is incredibly valuable, because it can be daunting and overwhelming. It can be very difficult to understand the system and what they're to expect.

It's not necessarily a legal.... They're not a lawyer, but they are there to support and advocate for them. Then they connect them with legal advisers, so it's very important.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I agree. I covered courts for many years and I knew many victims services workers. Their work is invaluable, but they're not heard by the court or the justice of the peace who's deciding bail. They're there to provide support, but they don't have a voice in the court.

If we had a lawyer who could intervene during a bail process with the justice of the peace and have an actual voice, to me that seems like a good solution.

What are your thoughts?

Ms. Jill Young: I think it would be a fantastic solution. It's definitely one of the barriers that we see day to day, because it's obviously significantly daunting.

Yes, it would be very valuable.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I have a question for the witnesses from Quebec.

What do you think about the idea of a government-paid lawyer whose job is to defend victims?

Ms. Martine Jeanson: That would be the best thing ever.

When a woman leaves a violent home, the man keeps everything, so he can afford a good lawyer. The woman has to go to a legal aid lawyer. They're not paid as much, so all they do is go to court. Legal aid lawyers don't fight for their clients like well-paid lawyers do.

If women had really good lawyers, they would get better advocacy, and there would be different outcomes. Women should have access to a good attorney. I don't know how the government could come up with funds for that, but I can tell you that legal aid lawyers are not the best advocates for women's issues at all.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you very much.

I only have a minute left, and I wanted to address another point.

[*English*]

There are some key recommendations from the National Police Federation. I'd like to get your thoughts on them.

One of them includes ensuring that justices of the peace actually have some legal background. JPs are the ones who decide on bail, and often they don't have any legal background whatsoever.

The other two recommendations are that provinces and territories share data among one another so that they have more information when they're exercising their discretion, as well as an enforceable bail monitoring system so that we actually know if somebody has violated the terms of their bail conditions or if they're not where they're supposed to be.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

Do any of you want to add anything to that?

Ms. Manon Monastesse: We see this all across the country. The problem really is violations of bail conditions. What happens when a spouse or any abuser does not comply with their conditions? Police officers, who lack training to properly assess the situation, believe they can't do anything, so they don't intervene. For example, they might say that all the man did was send the woman a letter to tell her that he still likes her, but that's coercive control. That's why it's important to criminalize coercive control. Once it's criminalized, officers can recognize behaviours that constitute coercive control, and they know they have a legal tool they can use to intervene and incarcerate these men who don't comply with their bail conditions. Failure to comply with conditions is supposed to automatically result in the person's imprisonment. That's what keeps victims and children safe.

So, yes, the way the judicial system deals with people who violate their conditions is a major problem.

We have worked with coroners across Canada, and their reports are very clear on this. In many cases, conditions are violated repeatedly leading up to the murders of women and children.

That's why it's important to pass coercive control legislation and enforce the law. Failure to comply with conditions must automatically lead to an arrest because that is a Criminal Code offence. Often, when a victim reports a violation, the police say they don't have any evidence, but the victim's word is evidence.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you.

At this point, that does conclude our panel for the evening. I certainly would like to thank all the witnesses for being here, for their testimony and for the remarks they've shared with everyone.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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