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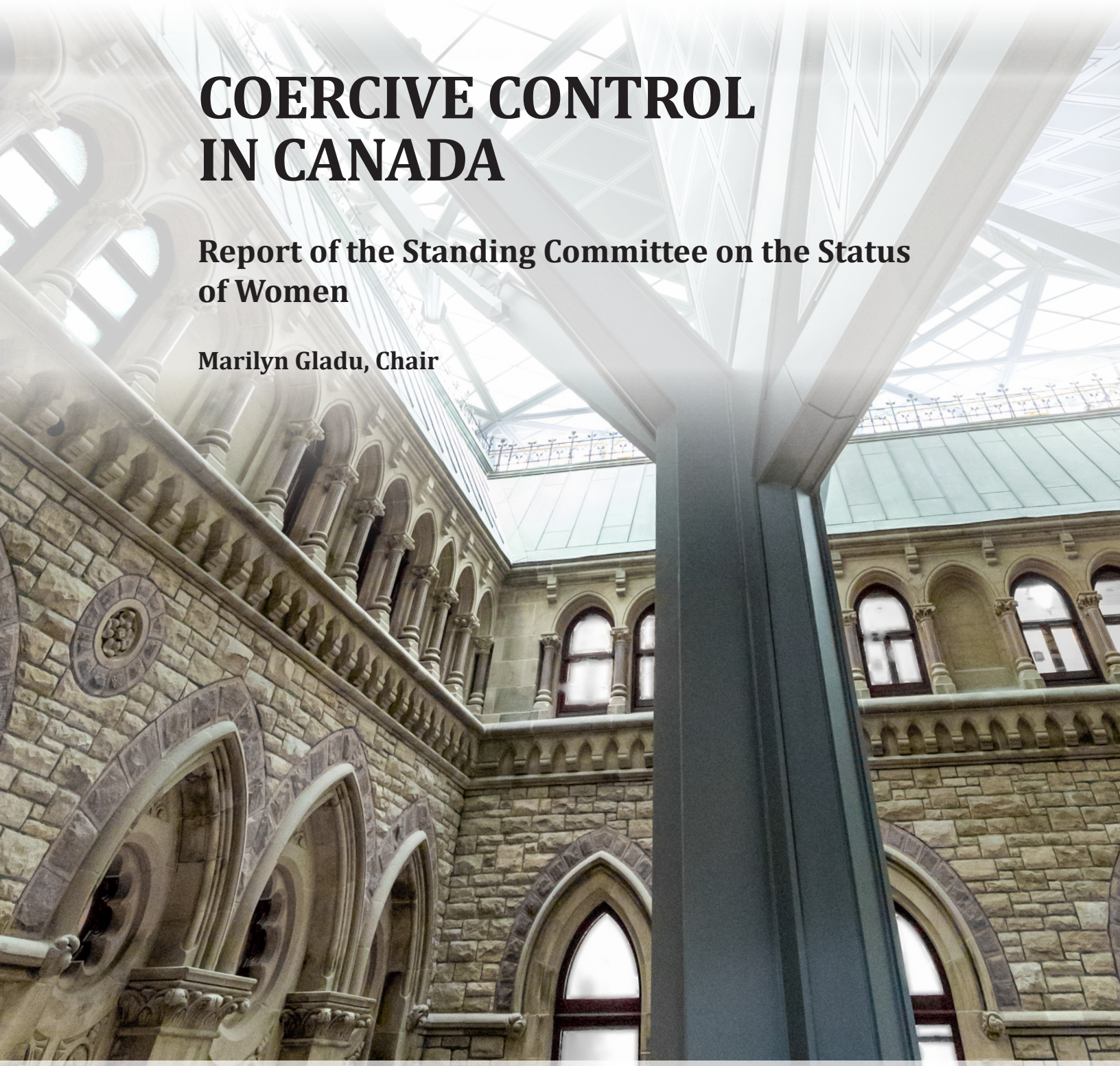

COERCIVE CONTROL IN CANADA

Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Marilyn Gladu, Chair

NOVEMBER 2025
45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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Chair

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

has the honour to present its

FIRST REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied coercive behaviour and has agreed to report the following:

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SUMMARY

Content warning: Please note that this report discusses topics that can be disturbing to some readers, including abuse, discrimination, and gender-based violence.

In Canada, there are efforts to address and prevent gender-based, intimate partner and family violence across levels of government, community organizations and civil society. Some of this recent work has focused on the issue of coercive control in the context of intimate partner and family violence. With the goal of contributing to this work, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women conducted a study of coercive behaviour, including domestic and international legislation on this issue. This report outlines the testimony and written submissions received by the Committee on the subject and includes 16 recommendations to the Government of Canada and 3 observations.

The Committee heard about coercive and controlling behaviour as a form of intimate partner violence and its consequences for women and their families, as well as the ways in which this issue is dealt with in Canadian – and other jurisdictions' – legislation. As well, many witnesses spoke about the harmful effects of parental alienation claims in family court proceedings and the ways in which these claims can be another form of coercive and controlling behaviour. Witnesses provided various suggestions related to reducing the harm caused by these claims.

Many witnesses before the committee believed that criminalizing coercive control in Canada would be an important positive step in addressing the problem of coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate partner relationships in Canada. Witnesses nevertheless cautioned that without implementing other supporting initiatives, criminal legislation may not have the intended effects in protecting victims, reducing the behaviour and ensuring accountability for perpetrators. Among the initiatives that should accompany such legislation were:

- training on coercive control and its effects, for individuals who would be in contact with victims, including those working in law enforcement and the justice system;
- public education and awareness about coercive control; and
- wraparound services for victims and survivors of coercive control and their families.

The Committee acknowledges the deeply harmful effects that coercive control has on women and their families. The Committee wishes to extend its deepest gratitude to those who shared their stories throughout this study. Through this report, the Committee aims to provide space for victims and survivors' stories and contribute to the ongoing efforts to address this behaviour in Canada.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada, with the goal of ensuring that survivors of family violence have access to justice in family courts and in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous women's organizations and service organizations working with survivors of intimate partner violence, conduct an in-depth study about the ways in which parental alienation claims are used under the *Divorce Act*, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, and that the results of this study be shared with federal, provincial and territorial Ministers of Justice ahead of a Federal-Provincial-Territorial Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Justice and Public Safety, and with Indigenous Peoples and governments, with the intention of:

- **reviewing the training and education of justice sector actors to improve their understanding and awareness of the role of coercive control;**
- **supporting Indigenous-led initiatives that are considering the issue and possible solutions; and**
- **considering whether legislative amendments within the jurisdiction of different levels of government might be necessary, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments.** **27**

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada study the implications of defining coercive and controlling behaviour in the *Divorce Act* and make the results of its study public, while respecting the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories in matters of family law, administration of justice and prevention. **28**

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, amend the *Divorce Act* to prevent parental alienation claims from being misused in cases of domestic violence or child abuse and from resulting in custody reversals or no contact order against the preferred parent. **28**

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, recognize that coercive control is a form of abuse but ensure that any criminalization of coercive control is worded to prevent misuse against mothers accused of parental alienation. **28**

Observation 1

That the way that parental alienation claims have been used in family law disputes can be abusive, founded on discriminatory stereotypes and, in itself, can be a form of coercive and controlling behaviour, the Committee wishes to bring testimony related to the misuse of these claims and of court-appointed reunification therapy to the attention of the Canadian Judicial Council, the professional regulatory bodies for lawyers and paralegals in each province, and the professional regulatory bodies for psychologists and clinical counsellors in each province, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, for their consideration and possible inclusion in future professional and continuing education programming. **30**

Observation 2

Given the Committee heard about the ways in which reunification camps are harmful for children, it brings to the attention of provinces and territories the dangers of allowing children to attend reunification camps or placing them with abusive parents on abusive litigation tactics and that they consider allowing testimony behind screens with support for family litigants with the goal of supporting children. **30**

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada amend the *Divorce Act* to allow judges to appoint legal counsel to represent children in family court proceedings involving allegations of domestic violence or parental alienation, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments. 31

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada create educational materials for mental health professionals and justice sector professionals who work with survivors of intimate partner violence and with disputes under the *Divorce Act,* while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments. 31

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada continue to support efforts to criminalize coercive control in Canada, and that appropriate education initiatives and training related to recognizing and responding to coercive control for police and professionals in the justice system are established prior to the coming into force of any criminal legislation, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments. 42

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and governments and service organizations working with survivors of violence, develop and implement public education and awareness campaigns, including materials that help to recognize and understand family violence and coercive control, and that these campaigns target various groups, including children and parents, racialized people, newcomers and Indigenous Peoples, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments. 42

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, work to increase earlier intervention relating to

awareness of child sexual abuse and coercion as well as human trafficking of children and youth. **42**

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, recognize animal mistreatment as a form of coercive behaviour and train justice personnel as well as law enforcement to assess this during intimate partner violence investigations. **43**

Observation 3

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous People and governments, to prevent exposure to coercive behaviours or exploitation, advise the provinces of the need to consider this in foster homes, care facilities and other environments to prevent inter-generational abuse. **43**

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, provide funding to organizations and service-providers that offer supports to victims and survivors of coercive control and their families, in order to ensure access to ongoing, culturally sensitive and wraparound services, including those related to:

- **emergency and transition shelters and affordable housing;**
- **legal representation and related resources;**
- **employment and skills-development services; and**
- **physical and mental health services that are trauma-informed.** **47**

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada provide funding in a way that respects the jurisdiction of and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories

and Indigenous Peoples and governments, to community-based organizations that are led by Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people, that are working to build capacity in Indigenous communities to address intimate partner and family violence, including coercive control, and to support Indigenous women experiencing this violence. 48

Recommendation 13

The Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, support initiatives with women's shelters whereby a companion animal can be accommodated, within reason. 48

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, implement integrated, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approaches to protect survivors, including coordinated support across justice, social services, health, and community organizations, considering intersectional risks. 48

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, provide funding for services that support resources to assist with rehabilitation for coercive behaviors and accountability mechanisms. 48

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, collect disaggregated data on coercive behaviour, intimate partner violence, and family violence, fund research on racialized and Indigenous communities, and address systemic inequities within the justice system to inform evidence-based policies. 48

COERCIVE CONTROL IN CANADA

SURVIVOR STORIES

> **“Even though the domestic violence and the abuse are extreme I was unable to leave. The reason FEAR. FEAR for your children’s life and safety FEAR for your own life. FEAR is how they control you.”**
>
> Dimitra Pantazopoulos, *Brief*,
> Brief submitted to the Committee,
> 27 February 2024.

> **“‘Don't mention abuse. I know it sounds wrong, but don't bring it up. Mothers who are victims of domestic violence don't fare well in family court.’ This jarring warning was the first legal advice I received. It proved prophetic.”**
>
> Witness 1, as an individual, *Evidence*,
> 23 October 2024.

> **“I want to give victims the courage to speak out, get help and stop the cycle of abuse. Unknowingly, my abuser gave me a very public platform and a loud voice—one that will change the misconception of domestic violence. You see, being a survivor requires great courage. I'm unmasking my story, but I refuse to be defined by the history of violence that I left behind.”**
>
> Kamal Dhillon, Author and speaker, as an individual, *Evidence*,
> 7 October 2024.

INTRODUCTION

During several of its recent studies, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO or the Committee) has received testimony underscoring the

significant harmful effects of intimate partner and family violence on women and their families in Canada. Coercive and controlling behaviour (referred to as coercive control throughout) is one facet of intimate partner and family violence that, according to survivors, community organizations, advocates and researchers, is dangerous and inadequately addressed in Canada. As such, the Committee agreed to undertake a study of coercive control in Canada, with a focus on legislation criminalizing this behaviour in other jurisdictions and in Canada. In November 2023, the Committee adopted the following motion:

> That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of coercive behaviour, focusing on and studying those countries or jurisdictions around the world that have already legislated on this issue; that the committee devote at least six meetings to this matter and then report its findings and recommendations to the House.[1]

As part of this study, between 7 May 2024 and 23 October 2024, the Committee heard from 41 witnesses and received 35 written submissions about coercive control in Canada.

The Committee's report is informed by witness testimony and written submissions, and focuses on the following areas:

- Defining the concept of coercive control, and discussing its consequences;
- Existing federal, provincial and territorial legal frameworks related to coercive control in Canada;
- The use of the theory of parental alienation in court proceedings in Canada;
- Measures to address coercive control in Canada, including criminalization, public education and awareness, and services for survivors.

At times, witnesses shared perspectives about issues beyond the federal jurisdiction. This report recognizes these important contributions, while respecting the jurisdiction of provinces, territories, and Indigenous governments. The Committee provides

1 House of Commons, Standing Committee on the Status of Women, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 27 November 2023.

16 recommendations to the Government of Canada, and 3 observations, with the goal of addressing coercive control and supporting survivors in Canada.

OVERVIEW: COERCIVE CONTROL IN CANADA

Identifying Coercive Control

Coercive and controlling behaviour is a facet of intimate partner and family violence that is often misunderstood or is not immediately visible because the harmful effects are generally cumulative, caused by multiple acts occurring over time.[2] This type of violence typically affects women disproportionately.[3] The consequences of this behaviour can be severe for women and their families; the Committee heard various descriptions and experiences of this behaviour throughout its study.

The concept of "coercive and controlling behaviour" is not explicitly mentioned in the *Criminal Code.* In the *Divorce Act,* while it is referred to as a form of family violence*,* it is not defined. Interpretations of coercive control provided by many witnesses referred to a repeated and ongoing pattern of behaviour,[4] including psychological abuse and

2 See for example: Carmen Gill, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick, as an individual, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; Carla Neto, Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024; Lisa Pigeau, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Women of the Métis Nation, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; Lori Chambers, Professor, Lakehead University, as an individual, *Evidence,* 23 May 2024.

3 Anonymous author 2, *Brief*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 27 June 2024. For example, in 2023, women and girls represented 68% of victims of family violence and 78% of victims of intimate partner violence. See Statistics Canada, "Trends in police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2023," *The Daily,* 24 October 2024.

4 Deepa Mattoo, Executive Director, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Dimitra Pantazopoulos, as an individual, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Lisa Pigeau, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Women of the Métis Nation, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024.

intimidation,[5] that is meant to "break a person down from the inside."[6] For example, according to Luke's Place:[7]

> Coercive control is a term that describes a pattern of behaviours, including psychological abuse -- which itself can encompass such things as intimidation, demeaning and insulting treatment, verbal abuse, threats, gaslighting, surveilling and stalking -- as well as social isolation and financial abuse. Physical violence may or may not be present, but the threat of it is often part of the coercive control.

Carmen Gill, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick, cited the example of Quebec,[8] where the Director of Criminal and Penal Prosecutions described "coercive control" as part of a set of guidelines issued to prosecutors for cases involving domestic violence:[9]

> The concept of "coercive control" refers to a form of intimate partner violence that can be invisible or more difficult to detect, as it is not based solely on physical incidents, acts of aggression or surveillance. The behaviours adopted by the offender may involve multiple strategies employed repetitively and cumulatively in an effort to take away the victim's freedom and assert their power over the victim. [TRANSLATION]

Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, emphasized that economic abuse is "a very common but often overlooked form of domestic abuse," that is a part of "coercive controlling behaviour."[10] Economic abuse often appears in intimate partnerships where there is coercive control or other forms of intimate partner violence. For example, Meseret Haileyesus spoke

---

5 Ibid.; and see for example: Barbara Ridley, Executive Director, Governing Council, Sudbury Cedar Place, Salvation Army, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; Coalition of Families Victims of Post-Separation Abuse, *Coercive Behaviour - Submission from Coalition of Families Victim of Post-Separation Abuse*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 24 July 2024; Justine Fortin, Director, Legal Services, Juripop, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024; Lori Chambers, Professor, Lakehead University, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

6 Aura Freedom International, *Brief Submission to the Standing Committee On The Status of Women for its Study on Coercive Behaviour*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 26 June 2024.

7 Luke's Place, *Addressing coercive control: Recommendations to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

8 Carmen Gill, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024.

9 Government of Quebec, Director of Criminal and Penal Prosecutions, *Violence conjugale*, 27 December 2023, p. 3.

10 "Financial abuse" is included in the list of conduct that constitutes family violence in section 2(1) of the *Divorce Act*, R.S.C, 1985, c. 3.

about research conducted by the Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment in the Ottawa region in 2021. Results of this research found that:[11]

> 95% of victims [of gender-based violence] experienced economic abuse, similar to findings in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. In addition to that, abusers demanded that 86% of victims quit their work; 93% of their abusers did not allow them to have their own money, taking away paycheques and financial aid; 90% of victims had decision-making power taken from them by their abusers; 90% of abusers threatened physical harm if the victim paid rent or other bills; and 84% of abusers had built up debt under the victim's name.

This type of abuse can include restricting financial independence through economic control, employment sabotage, and other forms of economic exploitation.[12]

Furthermore, according to the Ending Violence Association of Canada, sexual violence and sexual coercion remain "understudied" in the context of coercive control,[13] but sexual violence can play a fundamental role in coercive control.[14] Sexual violence in the context of coercive control can include frequent sexual assaults, denials of privacy, sexual humiliation, and "abusive behaviours that result in victims initiating sex in order to protect themselves."[15]

Witnesses also spoke about litigation-related abuse and coercive control. This type of abuse will be discussed in the sections on parental alienation claims.

Following the conclusion of the Committee's study in October 2024, the Supreme Court of Canada mentioned the concept of coercive control and recognized it as a form of family violence in June 2025. The types of coercive and controlling behaviour identified by the Court echo many of those discussed by witnesses before the committee. The Court stated: "Tactics and patterns of abuse such as 'isolation, manipulation, humiliation, surveillance, micro-regulation of gender performance, economic abuse,

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11 Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

12 Ibid.

13 Ending Violence Association of Canada, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Control in Canada Through a Sexualized Violence Lens*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 12 June 2024.

14 Lori Chambers, Professor, Lakehead University, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Gabrielle Comtois, Policy Analyst, Regroupement québécois des centres d'aides et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

15 Ending Violence Association of Canada, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Control in Canada Through a Sexualized Violence Lens*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 12 June 2024.

intimidation, and threats' as well as acts of physical and sexual violence can undermine a victim's autonomy […]."[16]

Experiences of Coercive Control among Marginalized Populations

The Committee heard that some groups of women and individuals may be particularly vulnerable to coercive control or may have specific experiences related to this type of abuse. For example, the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada (DAWN Canada) asserted that coercive control against women with disabilities is a significant concern and that ableism fuels coercive controls against people with disabilities. According to DAWN Canada, coercive control occurs in any relationship where there is an imbalance of power, which can include relationships with personal support workers, caregivers or family members. Some groups of women and gender diverse people with certain disabilities – such as those with behavioural conditions, personality disorders or oppositional disorders – may be more vulnerable to coercive controls from staff and caregivers.[17]

The Ontario Native Women's Association spoke about Indigenous women, noting that:[18]

> Indigenous women and girls are uniquely impacted by coercive control due to historic processes that underpin their daily lives, seen through the altered power relations between men and women at societal and systemic levels. Family violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls is an intersectional issue informed by the legacy of colonialism and targeted assimilation policies in Canada, as well as systemic racism, discrimination, sexism and the dismissal of Indigenous women's safety.

In addition, Lisa Pigeau, Director of Intergovernmental Relations for Women of the Métis Nation, explained that there is concern among Indigenous people that reports of intimate partner violence, including coercive control, may not be taken seriously by police. Notably there is concern that these reports could be "weaponized against women and gender-diverse folks." For example, some victims are concerned that if they call the authorities, they will lose their children.[19]

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16 *Dunmore v. Mehralian*, 2025 SCC 20, at para. 57. The decision was written by Judge Martin, concurred by Judges Wagner, Karakatsanis, Rowe, Kasirer, Jamal, O'Bonsawin and Moreau. Judge Côté wrote a dissenting opinion.

17 DAWN Canada, *The Standing Senate Committee on the Status of Women Standing Order 108(2): Study on Coercive Behaviour*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024.

18 Ontario Native Women's Association, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Behaviour*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

19 Lisa Pigeau, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Women of the Métis Nation, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024.

Consequences of Coercive Control

Witnesses agreed that coercive control is rarely discussed in our society, is poorly understood and is not easily identified by either victims or bystanders.[20] For many victims and survivors, identifying coercive control in their own experiences can be difficult, which in turn may affect their decisions to seek support because they do not feel they deserve help.[21] Without access to supports, the consequences of exposure to coercive control over time can include:

- losing freedom, autonomy or control;
- living in a state of constant fear;
- degrading of one's sense of self worth;
- mimicking or perpetuating the cycle of abuse among children exposed to this behaviour;[22]
- mental health struggles; and
- potentially life-threatening situations.[23]

Carla Neto, Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, shared with the committee that in their "experience in working with victims and survivors or abuse, all physical abuse was preceded by and will continue to include coercive behaviour."[24] Heidi

20 Carla Neto, Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024; Shelina Jeshani, Director, Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration, Safe Centre of Peel, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024; Wanda Polzin-Holman, Clinical Director, Little Warriors, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024.

21 Carrie McManus, Director, Innovation and Programs, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

22 Linda Lafantaisie Renaud, Executive Director, Horizon Women's Centre, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024; Roxana Parsa, Staff Lawyer, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

23 Linda Lafantaisie Renaud, Executive Director, Horizon Women's Centre, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024; and see for example: Luke's Place, *Addressing coercive control: Recommendations to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024; Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs, National Association of Women and the Law, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

24 Carla Neto, Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024.

Illingworth, Executive Director of Ottawa Victim Services, agreed that coercive control is a warning sign that must not be ignored.[25]

Furthermore, the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia emphasized the devastating effects of "failing to recognize and intervene in incidences" of coercive control, discussing the 2020 mass casualty event in Nova Scotia, during which a gunman posing as an RCMP officer attacked his intimate partner and then proceeded to kill 22 people, injure three others and set multiple fires in three different clusters of violence over the period of two days.[26] Transition House Nova Scotia told the Committee that the Mass Casualty Commission, appointed to inquire into these events, "recognized [coercive control] as a central factor in the years leading up to this tragedy, and that there were many missed opportunities to intervene by both police and bystanders."[27] The Mass Casualty Commission report explained the perpetrator's long history of violence and coercive control in his relationship with his common law spouse, Lisa Banfield, and described how "coercive control was one of the foremost characteristics of his behaviour in intimate partner relationships." Furthermore, the report stated:

> Consider this context. Ms. Banfield was the victim of decades of violent abuse and coercive control at the hands of the perpetrator. He controlled her finances, her employment, her housing, and even, at times, her movements. This control culminated in her harrowing experience as the mass casualty's first victim.[28]

25 Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024.

26 The violence on April 18-19, 2020 began with the shooter attacking his partner, Lisa Banfield. The perpetrator had a history of violent behaviours and intimate partner violence and his relationship with Lisa Banfield was marked with violence, coercion, and controlling behaviour toward her. The final report of the Mass Casualty Commission looked at the "collective social and institutional failures to perceive and respond effectively to gender-based, intimate partner, and family violence." The report concluded that "there is a close connection between gender-based, intimate partner, and family violence – in which the perpetrator engaged throughout his adult life – and the rarer phenomenon of mass casualty incidents." See Mass Casualty Commission, *Turning the Tide Together – Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission*, "Executive Summary and Recommendations," March 2023, p. 88, available to download on the website of the Mass Casualty Commission.

27 Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, *Written Brief on Coercive Control Legislation – A Nova Scotia Perspective*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 16 July 2024; Mass Casualty Commission, *Final Report*, 30 March 2023.

28 Mass Casualty Commission, *Turning the Tide Together, Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission, Volume 2, What Happened*, 20 March 2023; Mass Casualty Commission, *Turning the Tide Together, Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission, Volume 3, Violence*, 30 March 2023, pp. 50 and 298.

The report also described misconceptions of coercive control, and how a lack of understanding and its impacts contributed to the lack of intervention by police and bystanders.[29]

Remaining In, or Returning To, an Abusive Relationship

Various witnesses explained that the lack of control or agency created by coercive and controlling behaviour and a sense of fear for their own safety or that of their children itself makes it very difficult for victims to leave abusive situations.[30] A victim's ability to leave, or stay away from, an abusive relationship may also be significantly limited by financial and economic abuse and related coercive control, since victims may lack financial security and financial independence. In addition, the effects of economic coercive control can be long-lasting and can follow victims,[31] through "poor credit scores, debt and other financial impacts."[32] Furthermore, Humane Canada indicated that "perpetrators of abuse use animal abuse to coerce, control, and intimidate women, children and elders into staying silent about their abuse, preventing them from leaving, or forcing them to return."[33]

Legal Framework related to Coercive Control in Canada

Canadian Legal Framework Related to Family Law and Coercive Control

In Canada, family law is an area of shared federal-provincial jurisdiction.[34] Parliament has exclusive jurisdiction to make laws about marriage and divorce.[35] The main federal statute related to family law is the *Divorce Act*. Parliament also has exclusive jurisdiction

29 Ibid.

30 See for example Louise Riendeau, Co-responsible for Political Affairs, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Lori Chambers, Professor, Lakehead University, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

31 Lori Chambers, Professor, Lakehead University, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

32 Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

33 Humane Canada, *Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 21 June 2024.

34 *Constitution Act, 1867*, 30 & 31 Victoria, c. 3 (U.K.), ss. 91 and 92.

35 *Constitution Act, 1867*, 30 & 31 Victoria, c. 3 (U.K.), s. 91(26).

over criminal law.[36] A court that has jurisdiction over divorce proceedings under the *Divorce Act* can also make orders about support payments and parenting time, and make changes to those orders in the future.

The provinces have constitutional authority over the solemnization of marriage, as well as "property and civil rights," within the province.[37] Property and civil rights include laws governing custody or guardianship of children, matrimonial property, recognition of parenthood, child welfare as well as spousal and child support, for example. Provincial family law orders can be made before or after divorce if there is no contradictory order made under the *Divorce Act.* Provincial family law also governs the dissolution of common law relationships and civil unions, as well as questions related to parenting time, decision-making about children and child support.[38] Therefore, where parenting or support claims arise independently of divorce, they are determined under provincial family law. Table 1 summarizes jurisdiction for family law matters – such as parenting time, decision-making responsibility, child support and spousal support – based upon the context of the couples' relationship.

36 Parliament has jurisdiction over criminal law, except "the Constitution of Courts of Criminal Jurisdiction, but including the Procedure in Criminal Matters." Provincial legislatures have jurisdiction over the "Administration of Justice in the Province, including the Constitution, Maintenance, and Organization of Provincial Courts, both of Civil and of Criminal Jurisdiction, and including Procedure in Civil Matters in those Courts." *Constitution Act, 1867,* 30 & 31 Victoria, c. 3 (U.K.), s. 91(27) and 92(14).

37 *Constitution Act 1867*, 30 & 31 Victoria, c. 3 (U.K.), s. 92(12) and 92(13).

38 Peter W. Hogg, "Chapter 27:12 – Orders Under Provincial Law Where No Order Under Divorce Act," *Constitutional Law of Canada*, 5th ed., 5 November 2019.

Table 1—Jurisdiction for certain Family Law Matters

Context	Provincial jurisdiction	Federal jurisdiction
Couples that were never married to each other	Yes	No
Married couples that are separated but not in divorce proceedings	Yes	No
Married couples in divorce proceedings	No	Yes
Divorced couples[1]	No	Yes
Indigenous peoples[2]	Yes	Yes

Note 1: After divorce, provinces might have jurisdiction in some cases, including for foreign divorces.

Note 2 In general, Indigenous individuals are subject to federal and provincial legislation relating to family law matters, but enforcement and jurisdiction can be complex. Key considerations may include whether parties have status under the *Indian Act*, the location of income and assets (on or off-reserve), and the provision of child and family services. In some cases, the relevant Indigenous governing body may have exercised its jurisdiction to make laws regarding child and family services or regarding the division of real property rights and interests.

The Committee heard from witnesses that the interplay between federal and provincial jurisdiction creates additional complexity in addressing the problem of coercive control. Multiple levels of government have a role to play in addressing this important and multifaceted issue.

Federal Jurisdiction

Divorce

Recent changes to the *Divorce Act* reflect a shift in Canadian family law towards a child-centered approach.[39] Although historically, the "maximum contact" principle governed the relationship between a child and a parent without parenting time[40] under the

39 National Association of Women and the Law, *Banning Parental Alienation Accusations in Family Court*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, May 2024.

40 This parent has historically been referred to as the "noncustodial parent," but since 2021, the *Divorce Act* no longer uses the terms "custody" and "access" in order to best prioritize the child's best interests and help reduce conflict between parents, see Divorce: What Is "Parenting Time" and What to Do When Moving, *Éducaloi*.

Divorce Act,[41] in 2019, that principle was replaced with the "primary consideration that a court must consider a child's physical, emotional and psychological safety, security and well-being above all-else."[42] In 2021, further changes to the *Divorce Act* removed the "maximum contact" principle heading in lieu of "parenting time consistent with best interests of child."[43]

Individuals who are applying for a divorce may request orders related to support, payments and parenting time under the *Divorce Act*, as well as changes to these orders. Since divorce falls under federal jurisdiction, divorce cases are generally heard by the Superior Courts of a province. Unified Family Courts, which consolidate family law matters so that a single court deals with divorce, support, custody, property division, and other related issues, exist in most Canadian provinces.

Section 16 of the *Divorce Act* outlines provisions related to the best interests of the child of the marriage in making a parenting order or contact order. Section 16(3) outlines a non-exhaustive list of factors to be considered in determining the best interests of the child, including the child's needs, the nature and strength of the child's relationship with each spouse, and each spouse's willingness to support the development and maintenance of the child's relationship with the other spouse.[44] One of these factors – 16(3)(j) – is specific to family violence:[45]

> **(j)** any family violence and its impact on, among other things,
>
> **(i)** the ability and willingness of any person who engaged in the family violence to care for and meet the needs of the child, and
>
> **(ii)** the appropriateness of making an order that would require persons in respect of whom the order would apply to cooperate on issues affecting the child.

Section 16(4) requires a court to consider:[46]

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41 Government of Canada, *Legislative Background: An Act to amend the Divorce Act, the Family Orders and Agreements Enforcement Assistance Act and the Garnishment, Attachment and Pension Diversion Act and to make consequential amendments to another Act (Bill C-78 in the 42nd Parliament)*.

42 Ibid.

43 Government of Canada, *The Divorce Act Changes Explained*. See section 16(6), *Divorce Act*.

44 *Divorce Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. 3 (2nd Supp.), s. 16(3)(j).

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., s. 16(4).

(a) the nature, seriousness and frequency of the family violence and when it occurred;

(b) whether there is a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in relation to a family member;

(c) whether the family violence is directed toward the child or whether the child is directly or indirectly exposed to the family violence;

(d) the physical, emotional and psychological harm or risk of harm to the child;

(e) any compromise to the safety of the child or other family member;

(f) whether the family violence causes the child or other family member to fear for their own safety or for that of another person;

(g) any steps taken by the person engaging in the family violence to prevent further family violence from occurring and improve their ability to care for and meet the needs of the child; and

(h) any other relevant factor.

The *Divorce Act* recognizes the concept of coercive control as part of the definition of "family violence" but does not explicitly define it. Some witnesses argued that the *Divorce Act* definition of family violence is insufficient on its own in addressing coercive control. Justine Fortin, Director, Legal Services at Juripop, told the committee that it was crucial to include an explicit definition of coercive and controlling behaviour in the *Divorce Act*. In her view, "improving the definition in the Act would provide guidance not only for judges, but also for the professionals who work with [it]."[47] In particular, witnesses argued that including the concept of coercive control in family law disputes requires a recognition that this type of abuse involves restricting or eliminating a person's freedom of choice and the "micro-regulation of daily life."[48] Policies and programs that witnesses suggested would be needed to support the implementation of legislative changes, such as training on applying a definition for justice sector actors, are discussed later in this report.

47 Justine Fortin, Director, Legal Services, Juripop, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

48 Ibid.

Criminal Law

Although the concept of coercive control is explicitly included in the *Divorce Act*'s definition of family violence, there is no criminal offence of coercive control in Canada. The *Criminal Code* includes several offences that are related to but do not fully encapsulate coercive control, like assault, sexual assault, criminal harassment, stalking, and uttering threats.[49] These general offences are used in situations of intimate partner violence.[50] The *Criminal Code* also sets out principles related to judicial interim release (bail), which allows accused persons to be released from custody pending trial,[51] as well as sentencing for those convicted of criminal offences.[52]

Some witnesses argued in favor of criminalizing coercive control, while other witnesses had reservations around focusing on a criminal law response. The potential criminalization of coercive control is discussed in more detail in a section below.

COERCIVE CONTROL AND FAMILY LAW

The Committee heard about the intersection of coercive control and family law. More precisely, family courts are already dealing with the notion of coercive control in separation hearings. Different witnesses talked about the challenges around referring to coercive control in family law, such as insufficient understanding of what coercive control is and its consequences and the use of parental alienation claims. These challenges are described in more detail below.

Some witnesses spoke of perceived shortcomings in how family courts handle coercive control, for example, Julie Rioux, from the Coalition of Families Victims of Post-Separation Abuse provided the following example: "A criminal court judge might conclude that there is sufficient evidence to say that this woman's attacker cannot come into contact with her

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49 Luke's Place, *Addressing coercive control: Recommendations to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024; and see *Criminal Code*, R.S.C., 1985, c. C-46, sections 264, 264.1 and 265.

50 Government of Canada, *Overview of Bill C-75 – Legislative Background:* An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, *as enacted (Bill C-75 in the 42nd Parliament)*.

51 *Criminal Code*, R.S.C, 1985, c. C-46, Part XVI, Compelling Appearance of Accused Before a Justice and Interim Release.

52 *Criminal Code*, R.S.C, 1985, c. C-46, Part XXIII, Sentencing. Note: Section 718.2 (a)(ii) of the *Criminal Code* considers intimate partner violence as an aggravating factor during sentencing.

or her children. However, […] a … Superior Court [in a province dealing with a family law dispute] can lift that order to facilitate access rights."[53]

Sophie Gagnon, Executive Director of Juripop, explained to the Committee that "[a]lmost every day, our lawyers see that family law courts misunderstand coercive control" and they can even perpetuate coercive control and revictimize women through decisions like shared custody orders.[54] In a written submission, Carrie Leonetti explained the shortcomings with the treatment of coercive control by family courts, including the tendency of "treat[ing] acts of psychological violence or patterns of coercive control as insignificant," and courts' "[failure] to recognize coercive control by violent fathers, … the harm that it inflicts on victims, or its relationship to the ongoing need for protection."[55]

Witnesses also indicated that there is variability in the way that family courts in Canada approach requests for special supports for victims of coercive control in family law litigation.[56] Christy Dzikowicz, Chief Executive Officer of the Toba Centre for Children and Youth, told the Committee about how the use of "closed-circuit testimony" in some family law courts can support victims by ensuring that they do not have to testify in front of their abuser.[57] However, the Committee also heard that other family courts have a tendency to reject requests for the accommodation of victims' physical and psychological safety, which are routinely accepted in criminal courts, "because courts don't understand the difficulties related to coercive control."[58]

Lisa Heslop, Associate, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University, spoke about the negative impact of stereotypes about family violence in family court, and how education is needed within family courts to ensure that family violence is taken seriously.[59] In particular, many witnesses spoke to the Committee about the use of parental alienation claims, which are made in family

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53 Julie Rioux, Coalition of Families Victims of Post-Separation Abuse, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024.

54 Sophie Gagnon, Executive Director, Juripop, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

55 Carrie Leonetti, *Coercive Control and "Parental Alienation"*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 18 October 2024. See also Louise Riendeau, Co-responsible for Political Affairs, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

56 Jennifer Koshan, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

57 Christy Dzikowicz, Chief Executive Officer, Toba Centre for Children and Youth, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

58 Sophie Gagnon, Executive Director, Juripop, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

59 Lisa Heslop, Associate, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

court, and how these claims can be harmful for victims of family violence and coercive control. Parental alienation claims will be discussed in the sections below.

Legal Framework and Definition: Parental Alienation

> **"[Parental Alienation] accusations have become one of the most powerful tools for abusers to use to maintain coercive control and weaponize our legal and social systems against women and children seeking safety."**
>
> Witness 1, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

The term "parental alienation" was used for the first time in 1987 by psychiatrist Dr. Richard Gardner.[60] The concept was condemned by witnesses who appeared before the Committee who spoke about parental alienation claims and in written submissions on the subject. Jean Mercer, Professor Emerita of Psychology at Stockton University, offered this explanation of parental alienation:

> Parental alienation is a hypothetical phenomenon whose proponents believe that children who want to avoid a parent have often been persuaded by the preferred parent to take that attitude. They propose that children alleged to have been alienated must be separated by a court order from their preferred parent, subjected to reunification therapies and put in the custody of the avoided parent.[61]

Witnesses appearing before the committee who spoke about parental alienation criticized the concept, arguing that it lacks a scientific basis,[62] is not widely accepted,[63]

60 Tina Swithin, Advocate for Family Court Reform, One Mom's Battle, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

61 Jean Mercer, Professor Emerita of Psychology, Stockton University, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

62 See for example: Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs, National Association of Women and the Law, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Centre des femmes de Laval, *Le Centre des femmes de Laval: Fighting Against Accusations of Parental Alienation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 26 June 2024; Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick, *Coercive Control and Parental Alienation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024.

63 See for example: Tina Swithin, Advocate for Family Court Reform, One Mom's Battle, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024; Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale, *No to Accusations of Parental Alienation!*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 17 June 2024; Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick, *Coercive Control and Parental Alienation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024.

disproportionately targets women (who represent 90% of those accused of it),[64] and that its use in family law disputes is linked to family violence and intimate partner violence.[65] In 2023, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls, its Causes and Consequences recommended that all States "legislate to prohibit the use of parental alienation and related pseudo-concepts."[66]

Parental Alienation as Litigation Abuse and an Extension of Coercive Control

According to witnesses, parental alienation arguments have been used in family law disputes to refute allegations of violence made by women and children and to place children in the custody of an abuser.[67] Some witnesses argued the theory of parental alienation has contributed to a focus on parental rights rather than the best interests of the child in family courts, which can lead to courts ignoring or minimizing the impacts of family violence.[68]

The Committee heard that in family courts, parental alienation claims can have serious legal consequences. Witnesses provided examples where successful claim of parental

64 See for example: Carrie Leonetti, *Coercive Control and "Parental Alienation"*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 18 October 2024; Luke's Place, *Addressing coercive control: Recommendations to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024; Anonymous author 3, *Brief*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 29 June 2024.

65 See for example: Lisa Pigeau, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Women of the Métis Nation, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; National Association of Women and the Law, *Banning Parental Alienation Accusations in Family Court*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, May 2024; Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale, *No to Accusations of Parental Alienation!*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 17 June 2024.

66 National Association of Women and the Law, *Banning Parental Alienation Accusations in Family Court*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, May 2024.

67 Centre des femmes de Laval, *Le Centre des femmes de Laval: Fighting Against Accusations of Parental Alienation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 26 June 2024; Jennifer Koshan, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Lori Chambers, Professor, Lakehead University, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

68 Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick, *Coercive Control and Parental Alienation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024; Women's Shelters Canada, *Protecting Victims of Coercive Control from Post-Separation Abuse: A Needed Reform of Family Law*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 24 June 2024.

alienation could lead to a preferred parent losing their parenting time with the child.[69] Witnesses argued that claims of parental alienation in the family courts can also have the effect of perpetuating the coercive and controlling behaviour beyond the separation of the parents as it enables abusers to use family courts to their advantage.[70] The Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children at Western University uses the term "litigation abuse" to describe coercive and controlling behaviour in family law litigation, which can include litigation tactics including "making or threatening to make meritless claims; introducing false or irrelevant evidence; and causing unnecessary delays in the court proceedings."[71] Deepa Mattoo, Executive Director at the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, highlighted litigation abuse as a serious concern in situations where claims of parental alienation are made.[72]

Addressing Problematic Claims of Parental Alienation in Family Law

Numerous witnesses and written submissions supported the call to ban claims of parental alienation in family law disputes issued by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, its Causes and Consequences.[73] In Canada, the Committee heard that the National Association of Women and the Law and 250 other feminist organizations were calling on the federal government to ban

69 Carrie Leonetti, *Coercive Control and "Parental Alienation"*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 18 October 2024; Jennifer Koshan, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

70 Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale, *No to Accusations of Parental Alienation!*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 17 June 2024; Amy Deschamps, Director, Housing and Gender Based Violence Support Services, YWCA Hamilton, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

71 Western University, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, *Recognizing Litigation Abuse as a Form of Family Violence: Understanding the Concept and the Potential Harm*, 27 September 2022.

72 Deepa Mattoo, Executive Director, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

73 See for example: Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale, *No to Accusations of Parental Alienation!*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 17 June 2024; Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024; Women's Shelters Canada, *Protecting Victims of Coercive Control from Post-Separation Abuse: A Needed Reform of Family Law*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 24 June 2024; Louise Riendeau, Co-responsible for Political Affairs, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

accusations of parental alienation in family court.[74] Several witnesses discussed the importance of instituting a ban on parental alienation accusations at the same time or before the criminalization of coercive control.[75]

Different methods of going about banning the use of claims of parental alienation in family law disputes were discussed at Committee. Some witnesses proposed that a ban on claims of parental alienation be included as part of the *Divorce Act*.[76]

Finally, the Committee also heard about a need for harmonization across the country. In its written submission, the Salvation Army argued that a review of provincial and territorial family law was needed "to harmonize legislation with criminal abuse statutes and increase protections for unmarried partners."[77]

Based on the evidence that it heard, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada, with the goal of ensuring that survivors of family violence have access to justice in family courts and in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous women's organizations and service organizations working with survivors of intimate partner violence, conduct an in-depth study about the ways in which parental alienation claims are used under the *Divorce Act*, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, and that the results of this study be shared with federal, provincial and territorial Ministers of Justice ahead of a Federal-Provincial-Territorial Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Justice and Public Safety, and with Indigenous Peoples and governments, with the intention of:

- **reviewing the training and education of justice sector actors to improve their understanding and awareness of the role of coercive control;**

74 Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs, National Association of Women and the Law, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Jennifer Koshan, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

75 Witness 1, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024; Jean Mercer, Professor Emerita of Psychology, Stockton University, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

76 Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024; Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick, *Coercive Control and Parental Alienation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024.

77 Salvation Army, *Brief Submission for the Study of Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024.

- **supporting Indigenous-led initiatives that are considering the issue and possible solutions; and**

- **considering whether legislative amendments within the jurisdiction of different levels of government might be necessary, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments.**

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada study the implications of defining coercive and controlling behaviour in the *Divorce Act* and make the results of its study public, while respecting the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories in matters of family law, administration of justice and prevention.

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, amend the *Divorce Act* to prevent parental alienation claims from being misused in cases of domestic violence or child abuse and from resulting in custody reversals or no contact order against the preferred parent.

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, recognize that coercive control is a form of abuse but ensure that any criminalization of coercive control is worded to prevent misuse against mothers accused of parental alienation.

Effects of Parental Alienation Claims on Families and Children

In a brief, Women's Shelters Canada explained that the "repercussions of parental alienation accusations extend far beyond legal proceedings, inflicting lasting emotional and psychological trauma on victims and their children."[78] Different witnesses talked about the importance of listening to children in family court cases. One witness talked

78 Women's Shelters Canada, *Protecting Victims of Coercive Control from Post-Separation Abuse: A Needed Reform of Family Law*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 24 June 2024.

about the importance of "listening to [children's] ideas when they talk about abuse, listening to their experiences and, again, providing them with a children's lawyer and the support that they need throughout this process."[79] Another witness told the committee that young victims of coercive behaviour need better protection through, for example, legislation that could ensure children's legal representation or access to an abuse-informed clinician so that "their experiences [are] directly presented to the court."[80]

Reunification Therapy

Some witnesses explained that accusations of parental alienation can lead to court appointed assessors recommending, or courts ordering, that children undergo what is often referred to as "reunification therapy" or attend "reunification camps."[81] An anonymous witness told the Committee that reunification therapy has many forms and different labels, such as "reunification," "reintegration," or "reconciliation." Sometimes, reunification therapy may be undertaken under the general rubric of "family therapy."[82]

Some witnesses expressed concerns regarding what they considered to be a lack of rigorous professional training and practice standards for the practice of reunification therapy. Wanda Polzin-Holdman, Clinical Director at Little Warriors, emphasized the need "for professionals to be properly trained with trauma-informed approaches that are also culturally informed and for independent therapy to be offered to the child in conjunction with perhaps both parents having their own therapy" instead of reunification therapy being prioritized.[83] Dimitra Pantazopoulos also emphasized the need for psychological assessments related to family court cases and parental alienation claims to be done by experts on domestic violence.[84]

Overall, many witnesses agreed that parental alienation claims in family law disputes are harmful to children and witnesses talked about how reunification therapy can be

79 Witness 2, as an individual, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024.

80 Ibid.

81 Anonymous author 2, *Brief*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 27 June 2024; Jennifer Koshan, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

82 Witness 1, as an individual, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024. See also: Jean Mercer, Professor Emerita of Psychology, Stockton University, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

83 Wanda Polzin-Holman, Clinical Director, Little Warriors, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024.

84 Dimitra Pantazopoulos, as an individual, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

traumatizing.[85] Witnesses suggested that tactics used during reunification therapy could even include threats, verbal abuse and intimidation.[86] For example, Jean Mercer told the Committee about her experience researching and documenting reunification therapy. The witness stressed that many of the measures used were harmful and argued for a ban on the following practices: "The child cannot be taken by youth transport service workers [to reunification camps]; the child cannot be prevented from any contact with the preferred parent; and the child cannot be placed in the custody of someone with whom there is some kind of record that abuse has occurred."[87]

Therefore, the Committee observes:

Observation 1

That the way that parental alienation claims have been used in family law disputes can be abusive, founded on discriminatory stereotypes and, in itself, can be a form of coercive and controlling behaviour, the Committee wishes to bring testimony related to the misuse of these claims and of court-appointed reunification therapy to the attention of the Canadian Judicial Council, the professional regulatory bodies for lawyers and paralegals in each province, and the professional regulatory bodies for psychologists and clinical counsellors in each province, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, for their consideration and possible inclusion in future professional and continuing education programming.

Observation 2

Given the Committee heard about the ways in which reunification camps are harmful for children, it brings to the attention of provinces and territories the dangers of allowing children to attend reunification camps or placing them with abusive parents on abusive litigation tactics and that they consider allowing testimony behind screens with support for family litigants with the goal of supporting children.

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85 See for example: Anonymous author 2, *Brief*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 27 June 2024; Julie Rioux, Coalition of Families Victims of Post-Separation Abuse, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024; Women's Shelters Canada, *Protecting Victims of Coercive Control from Post-Separation Abuse: A Needed Reform of Family Law*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 24 June 2024; Tina Swithin, Advocate for Family Court Reform, One Mom's Battle, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

86 Witness 1, as an individual, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024.

87 Jean Mercer, Professor Emerita of Psychology, Stockton University, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

The Committee recommends:

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada amend the *Divorce Act* to allow judges to appoint legal counsel to represent children in family court proceedings involving allegations of domestic violence or parental alienation, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments.

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada create educational materials for mental health professionals and justice sector professionals who work with survivors of intimate partner violence and with disputes under the *Divorce Act,* while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments.

CRIMINALIZING COERCIVE CONTROL IN CANADA

Overview: International Jurisdictions with Coercive Control Legislation

In recent years, different jurisdictions have adopted legislation to criminalize coercive behaviour, such as England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Australia. The Committee heard about some measures taken by different jurisdictions and the challenges that came with the criminalization.

In 2012, England changed its definition of domestic violence found in the *Domestic Abuse Act* to include coercive control. The Committee heard that the change in the definition of domestic violence in England raised awareness around the term coercive control.[88] In 2015, England criminalized coercive control.[89] In Scotland, coercive control was criminalized in 2018.

Andrea Silverstone, Chief Executive Officer, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, told the Committee that research from the College of Policing in the United Kingdom

88 Andrea Silverstone, Chief Executive Officer, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

89 Deepa Mattoo, Executive Director, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; England & Wales, Serious Crime Act 2015, s. 76.

found that criminalizing coercive control "enhanced the police response to domestic abuse, allowing for earlier and more effective intervention."[90] Andrea Silverstone used England and Scotland as good examples of "statutory guidelines around coercive control to ensure victims have safeguards around them, especially marginalized victims."[91] Karine Barrette, Lawyer and Project Manager at Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, told the Committee that in discussions with stakeholders from England and Scotland on the lessons learned from criminalizing coercive control, they all agreed it was the right approach and that "there was no going back."[92]

However, the Committee heard that the criminalization of coercive control came with challenges such as securing convictions. The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking said authorities in the United Kingdom also found it "challenging to collect evidence on coercive control, a crime that is often perpetrated by emotional and psychological tactics."[93] A 2023 report in the United Kingdom "found that only 3.7% of coercive behaviour cases resulted in a charge and over half (53.9%) were dropped, often due to survivors deciding not to pursue the charges."[94] The lack of physical evidence and a dependence on victim testimony create evidentiary hurdles that are compounded by insufficient judicial training, making coercive control cases "difficult to prosecute."[95]

Research in England and Scotland found that criminalization did not have "any significant impact on the rates of domestic abuse" and survivors often faced barriers in the justice system and felt like their experiences were never taken fully into consideration.[96]

Other witnesses, argued that English and Scottish experiences did not provide a good framework for evaluating the potential effects of criminalizing coercive and controlling behaviour on Indigenous individuals in Canada, given the legacy of colonialism and the

90 Andrea Silverstone, Chief Executive Officer, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

91 Ibid.; Government of the United Kingdom, *Controlling or coercive behaviour: statutory guidance framework (accessible)*.

92 Karine Barette, Lawyer and Project Manager, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

93 Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, *Written Brief on Study on Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 Deepa Mattoo, Executive Director, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

historically difficult relationships between Indigenous peoples and police.[97] Meseret Haileyesus pointed to Australian jurisdictions, where reports "on criminalizing coercive behaviour [show] an increase in misidentifying aboriginal women as aggressors due to the systemic racism among police and the court system."[98]

Criminalizing Coercive Control in Canada

Bill C-332, an Act to amend the Criminal Code (coercive control of intimate partner), was considered during the 44th Parliament. The bill was adopted by the House of Commons and considered in the Senate but died on the Order Paper when Parliament was prorogued on 6 January 2025. The bill would have created an offence of exercising coercive control of an intimate partner in the *Criminal Code*.

During its study, the Committee heard different witnesses share their recommendations around the criminalization of coercive behaviour. Some witnesses believed that legislation around coercive control will allow victims "to see their experiences recognized and validated."[99] Carrie McManus, Director of Innovation and Programs at Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, said that criminalization will give validity to victims of coercive control, while Heidi Illingworth said that criminalization "will help to change public perceptions, reduce stigma around seeking help and better define what is abuse and what is a healthy relationship."[100] Heidi Illingworth identified other advantages of criminalization, including the potential for earlier intervention by authorities, as well as a legal avenue to address these forms of abuse that provides "a broader scope of protection to victims who may not have experienced physical harm but are often paralyzed by fear from the psychological abuse and manipulation of their partners."[101] In addition, Carrie McManus mentioned that "[w]e often hear from police that they are looking for coercive

97 Ibid.; Lisa Pigeau, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Women of the Métis Nation, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024.

98 Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

99 Andrea Silverstone, Chief Executive Officer, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; see also Louise Riendeau, Co-responsible for Political Affairs, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

100 Carrie McManus, Director, Innovation and Programs, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024.

101 Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024.

control legislation because it would allow them to actually act and move forward on what they're seeing."[102]

While many witnesses agreed that recognizing coercive control as a criminal offence is important, many had concerns or recommended that specific measures need to be implemented before creating a criminal offence.[103] Indeed, the committee was told that criminalization "is not a magic wand, that will immediately end the epidemic of domestic abuse."[104] Lisa Heslop called for "an implementation task force" to be set up to manage any *Criminal Code* amendments, which "should consider necessary education and training, and also provisions that can be put in place to protect against the misuse of these new provisions."[105] The Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland, Nova Scotia voiced concern over the continuous focus on punitive responses to addressing gender-based violence.[106] Aura Freedom International suggested that a new criminal offence would do very little to address the root causes of gender-based violence and coercive control.[107]

Additionally, several witnesses raised concerns around creating a criminal offence before addressing the structural and systemic issues that impact equity-deserving groups in the justice system.[108] The Ontario Native Women's Association argued that "expanding criminalization and the powers of police will not address the underlying issues that drive

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102 Carrie McManus, Director, Innovation and Programs, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

103 Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick, *Coercive Control and Parental Alienation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024; Amy Deschamps, Director, Housing and Gender Based Violence Support Services, YWCA Hamilton, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

104 Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Coercive Control Legislation: Day One Recommendations for implementing coercive control legislation in Canada*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 9 July 2024.

105 Lisa Heslop, Associate, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

106 Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland, Nova Scotia, *Coercive Control Brief*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 9 August 2024.

107 Aura Freedom International, *Brief Submission to the Standing Committee On The Status of Women for its Study on Coercive Behaviour*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 26 June 2024.

108 See for example: Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Coercive Control Legislation: Day One Recommendations for implementing coercive control legislation in Canada*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 9 July 2024; Us Too, *SUBMISSION by #UsToo on Coercive Control to FEWO House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 17 September 2024; Amy Deschamps, Director, Housing and Gender Based Violence Support Services, YWCA Hamilton, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

and enable violence against Indigenous women."[109] Furthermore, Indigenous, racialized and other marginalized victims often "don't report less hidden forms of abuse and violence to the police."[110] The Committee heard that creating a criminal offence would not reduce women's mistrust of police services when they report violence, particularly in the case of Indigenous peoples, racialized or other marginalized victims, because of institutional racism.[111]

Some witnesses voiced concerns about the potential unintended consequences of criminalizing coercive behaviour. Considering that coercive control is nuanced and can be hard to identify, it can be a challenge for victims to seek help through the criminal justice system.[112] Several witnesses feared that this new criminal offence could potentially be used against the actual victims.[113] The Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick told the Committee that "criminalizing coercive control might inadvertently empower abusers, who could manipulate this section of the *Criminal Code* to further victimize and control their partners."[114] Witnesses also emphasized that the justice system can be retraumatizing for victims.[115] The Ending Violence Association of Canada said that "[t]rials are often rife with misconceptions, myths, and stereotypes and many survivors – particularly those with marginalized and intersecting identities – experience revictimization in their interactions with the criminal justice system."[116] Deepa Mattoo

109 Ontario Native Women's Association, Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Behaviour, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

110 Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

111 Ibid.; Ontario Native Women's Association, Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Behaviour, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

112 Ending Violence Association of Canada, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Control in Canada Through a Sexualized Violence Lens*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 12 June 2024.

113 See for example: Aura Freedom International, *Brief Submission to the Standing Committee On The Status of Women for its Study on Coercive Behaviour*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 26 June 2024; Deepa Mattoo, Executive Director, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Sophie Gagnon, Executive Director, Juripop, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024; Roxana Parsa, Staff Lawyer, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

114 Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick, *Coercive Control and Parental Alienation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024.

115 Ibid.; and Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland, Nova Scotia, *Coercive Control Brief*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 9 August 2024.

116 Ending Violence Association of Canada, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Control in Canada Through a Sexualized Violence Lens*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 12 June 2024.

expressed the view that "criminalizing coercive control without changing the attitude of our justice system and the misogyny within the justice system" represents a challenge.[117]

Luke's Place told the Committee that instead of creating a new criminal offence, Canada should review criminal offences and policies that already exist to determine their effectiveness "as recommended by both the CKW [Culleton, Kuzyk and Warmerdam] inquest and the Mass Casualty Commission."[118] Since the rate of reporting incidents of intimate partner violence to police are very low, the Ontario Native Women's Association expressed concern that a new offence in the *Criminal Code* would probably affect only a small number of victims and would not help around 70% of victims who do not report.[119]

In general, many witnesses talked about the importance of embedding the process of criminalizing coercive control into a larger, comprehensive strategy aiming to address and eliminate violence against women and children.[120] For example, Lisa Heslop expressed support for the conclusion of the Mass Casualty Commission "that criminal solutions to gender-based violence are effective only to the extent that they are part of a broader, community-based response."[121]

Certain witnesses emphasized the importance of focusing on specific measures and achieving targets before creating a criminal offence for coercive control. Some of the measures needed to address coercive control included: prevention, education for the

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117 Deepa Mattoo, Executive Director, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

118 Luke's Place, *Addressing coercive control: Recommendations to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024; Mass Casualty Commission, *Turning the Tide Together – Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission*, "Executive Summary and Recommendations," March 2023; Office of the Chief Coroner, *Verdict of Coroner's Jury*, June 2022. The CKW inquest was held after Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam were murdered on 22 September 2015 by a man with whom each had had a past relationship.

119 See for example: Aura Freedom International, *Brief Submission to the Standing Committee On The Status of Women for its Study on Coercive Behaviour*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 26 June 2024; Luke's Place, *Addressing coercive control: Recommendations to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024; Sophie Gagnon, Executive Director, Juripop, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

120 See for example: Carla Neto, Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024; Ontario Native Women's Association, Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Behaviour, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024; and Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, *Written Brief on Coercive Control Legislation – A Nova Scotia Perspective*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 16 July 2024; Karine Barrette, Lawyer and Project Manager, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

121 Lisa Heslop, Associate, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

public and raising awareness around coercive control, specific training for police and professionals in the criminal justice system and consultation with survivors to address their needs.[122] Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs, National Association of Women and the Law, mentioned "ending women's financial dependence, making it safe for women to leave, reforming family law and removing those accusations of parental alienation" as priority interventions before criminalizing coercive control.[123] Overall, many witnesses agreed that an offence of coercive control needs a broad range of supports beyond legal ones to ensure a positive effect. Lisa Heslop and the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale recommended that Canada follows an Australian example where the coming into force of coercive control legislation was delayed to "allow time for considerable education, training and consultation with police, criminal justice professionals and stakeholders and with the frontline sector."[124] Transition House Association of Nova Scotia highlighted that "if implemented with caution, the criminalization of [coercive control] has the potential to validate the experiences of survivors and to raise awareness among the public of the complexities of [intimate partner violence]."[125] Some witnesses also concluded that an update to the *Criminal Code* would need to be accompanied by a re-examination of family law.[126]

Additionally, education for the public was portrayed as essential for a new offence of coercive control to be effective and implemented successfully into frontline responses. The need for education is discussed below.

122 Ending Violence Association of Canada, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Control in Canada Through a Sexualized Violence Lens*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 12 June 2024.

123 Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs, National Association of Women and the Law, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

124 Lisa Heslop, Associate, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024; New South Wales, Australia, *Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Act 2022 No 65*.

125 Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, *Written Brief on Coercive Control Legislation – A Nova Scotia Perspective*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 16 July 2024.

126 Barbara Ridley, Executive Director, Governing Council, Sudbury Cedar Place, Salvation Army, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024; Taylor Briscoe, Assistant Director, Public Affairs, Salvation Army, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024.

Initiatives to Support the Prevention and Criminalization of Coercive Control

The Committee heard that preventing coercive control in Canada will require measures beyond legislation criminalizing the behaviour. As indicated in previous sections of this report, witnesses agreed that training for individuals in the justice system, including members of law enforcement, legal professionals, and the judiciary, would be necessary. However, many also cautioned that this legislation should be implemented in combination with certain other complementary initiatives, including public education and awareness initiatives and the provision of wraparound services for survivors and their families.

Justice Sector Training Related to Coercive Control Legislation

Concerns related to the criminal justice sector's focus on physical acts of violence, rather than psychological or emotional violence, were raised by several witnesses. In its brief, the Salvation Army argued that violence in "criminal law is narrowly defined as physical acts, and while psychological acts can be considered, there is a patchwork of applications and understandings."[127] This focus on physical acts omits more insidious forms of coercive control like emotional, psychological and financial abuse.[128] Indeed, Andrea Silverstone stated that "60% to 80% of survivors who experience non-physical forms of abuse[…] go unvalidated and unsupported."[129] Many witnesses advised that if coercive control is criminalized, it must be accompanied by additional training for police, judges and legal professionals for them to be able to recognize and effectively respond to coercive control, including training on how to gather and analyze evidence of any non-physical acts.[130]

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127 Salvation Army, *Brief Submission for the Study of Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024.

128 Carrie McManus, Director, Innovation and Programs, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

129 Andrea Silverstone, Chief Executive Officer, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

130 See for example: Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, *Submission for the House of Commons' Standing Committee on the Status of Women (Revised)*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 10 October 2024; Kerri Thomson, Manager, Justice and Legislative Affairs, Human Canada, *Evidence*, 7 October 2024; Us Too, *SUBMISSION by #UsToo on Coercive Control to FEWO House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 17 September 2024; Jennifer Koshan, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Roxana Parsa, Staff Lawyer, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Lori Chambers, Professor, Lakehead University, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

Indeed, research found that "when first responders and people working within prosecution services are unable to properly recognize and identify coercive control, especially when it is not accompanied by physical harm, it creates more barriers for victims looking to come forward, as they risk having their needs be minimized."[131] It is also important for police to be able to recognize coercive behaviours so they can intervene and make referrals to victim services where social workers would potentially offer counselling and support services.[132] Kerri Thomson, Manager of Justice and Legislative Affairs at Human Canada, also advocated for training so that legal professionals and law enforcement understand animal abuse and how it can be used as a tactic of coercive control.[133]

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police asked that indicators of coercive control be developed to guide interventions by police before any new offence of coercive control comes into force. The association recommended "the creation of an assessment tool to enable police officers to clearly and consistently recognize the elements that constitute coercive control behaviour."[134] Carmen Gill concurred that police officers will need to have the specific tools to investigate a coercive control offence and ask more targeted questions.[135] Luke's Place advocated for mandatory training for all police as well as the implementation of accountability measures to ensure that police officers apply the training in a meaningful way and respect a standard of practice when it comes to intimate partner violence and coercive control calls.[136] Carrie Leonetti shared a similar recommendation, saying that training "must be accompanied by post-training skills assessment."[137] Nick Milinovich, Deputy Chief of Police, shared information on the trauma-informed training given by expert partners to police officers for the Peel

131 Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Coercive Control Legislation: Day One Recommendations for implementing coercive control legislation in Canada*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 9 July 2024.

132 Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024; Amy Deschamps, Director, Housing and Gender Based Violence Support Services, YWCA Hamilton, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

133 Kerri Thomson, Manager, Justice and Legislative Affairs, Human Canada, *Evidence*, 7 October 2024.

134 Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, *Submission for the House of Commons' Standing Committee on the Status of Women (Revised)*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 10 October 2024.

135 Carmen Gill, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick, as an individual, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024.

136 Luke's Place, *Addressing coercive control: Recommendations to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

137 Carrie Leonetti, *Coercive Control and "Parental Alienation"*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 18 October 2024.

Regional Police and where they have "one of the largest, centralized, off-site intimate partner violence units in the country."[138] The Committee heard that coercive control training for police officers is already being offered in the province of Quebec by the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale.[139]

The Salvation Army pointed out that training for legal professionals and law enforcement is needed to ensure that victims and survivors are "treated with empathy and receive appropriate consideration and protection under the law."[140] Carla Neto advocated for a shift in perspective and the need to recognize that violence and coercive control exist:

> [W]hen a police officer comes to an incident of domestic violence, it is important that the woman be believed. If an officer comes in and the perpetrator […] says 'Oh, she's not doing well', 'She's crazy' or 'she has mental health issue', and the police officer is okay with that and does not proceed, we won't have legal protection, because that police officer won't act quickly.[141]

Regarding the recommendations around training for judges, the National Association of Women and the Law reminded the Committee that "judicial education and its content cannot be mandated. Even if the legislature encourages judicial education, not all judges will attend such a training."[142] Nevertheless, witnesses believed that training for judges is essential, in particular to combat stereotypes about victims.[143]

Public Education and Awareness Related to Coercive Control

Many witnesses agreed that, in combination with legislation criminalizing coercive control and related training described above, public education and awareness initiatives

138 Nick Milinovich, Deputy Chief of Police, Peel Regional Police, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

139 Carmen Gill, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick, as an individual, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024.

140 Salvation Army, *Brief Submission for the Study of Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024.

141 Carla Neto, Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024.

142 National Association of Women and the Law, *New information on Stopping Parental Alienation Accusations against Victims of Coercive Control*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

143 Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, *Written Brief on Study on Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

must be implemented for legislation criminalizing coercive control to have the intended effects and to prevent the behaviour in Canada.[144]

In its brief, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society submitted that it is "vital" to provide public education and awareness initiatives to ensure that legislation criminalizing coercive control is "effectively incorporated into frontline responses." The organization suggested that, as a first step, the public's current understanding of gender-based violence and coercive control should be measured; then, as a second step, public education and awareness initiatives should be developed based on the results of these measures.[145] Sunder Singh, Executive Director of the Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women, emphasized that public education should target young people, as well as their parents.[146] The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking added that a "successful communication strategy [for public awareness initiatives] could be directed at higher risk communities and [could] share information on how survivors can access help and the services available to them."[147] Barbara Ridley, the Executive Director of the Governing Council at Sudbury Cedar Place, and others, explained that public education would benefit victims, since they may not recognize signs of coercive control and may not know their rights, or the supports available.[148]

Finally, Carrie McManus explained that victims of intimate partner and family violence will often tell a friend or family before seeking formal support. Furthermore, they are more likely to pursue formal support if their first conversation with friends or family members is a positive one.[149] As such, better public awareness through education could

144 See for example: Ibid.; Carmen Gill, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick, as an individual, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; Witness 2, as an individual, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024; Gabrielle Comtois, Policy Analyst, Regroupement québécois des centres d'aides et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

145 Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Coercive Control Legislation: Day One Recommendations for implementing coercive control legislation in Canada*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 9 July 2024.

146 Sunder Singh, Executive Director, Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

147 Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, *Written Brief on Study on Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

148 Barbara Ridley, Executive Director, Governing Council, Sudbury Cedar Place, Salvation Army, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; Linda Lafantaisie Renaud, Executive Director, Horizon Women's Centre, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

149 Carrie McManus, Director, Innovation and Programs, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024.

help to empower friends, family and the general public to intervene and support victims when they disclose stories of abuse and coercive control.[150]

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada continue to support efforts to criminalize coercive control in Canada, and that appropriate education initiatives and training related to recognizing and responding to coercive control for police and professionals in the justice system are established prior to the coming into force of any criminal legislation, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments.

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and governments and service organizations working with survivors of violence, develop and implement public education and awareness campaigns, including materials that help to recognize and understand family violence and coercive control, and that these campaigns target various groups, including children and parents, racialized people, newcomers and Indigenous Peoples, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments.

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, work to increase earlier intervention relating to awareness of child sexual abuse and coercion as well as human trafficking of children and youth.

150 Andrea Silverstone, Chief Executive Officer, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Carrie McManus, Director, Innovation and Programs, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Shelina Jeshani, Director, Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration, Safe Centre of Peel, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024; Karine Barrette, Lawyer and Project Manager, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Gabrielle Comtois, Policy Analyst, Regroupement québécois des centres d'aides et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, recognize animal mistreatment as a form of coercive behaviour and train justice personnel as well as law enforcement to assess this during intimate partner violence investigations.

The committee observes:

Observation 3

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous People and governments, to prevent exposure to coercive behaviours or exploitation, advise the provinces of the need to consider this in foster homes, care facilities and other environments to prevent inter-generational abuse.

Services for Survivors of Coercive Control

The Committee heard that supports for victims and survivors of coercive control are integral to healing and to preventing this behaviour.[151] For example, Dawn McIlmoyle wrote:

> Support programs for people experiencing coercive control would allow them to see that they are not alone and perhaps provide some healing by knowing they are normal for them. By creating strong self-esteem, self-confidence and a powerful sense of security and safety, people will no longer tolerate conditions that are negative and toxic. Being able to say no and set healthy boundaries is extremely important. Normalizing that it is ok to care about yourself and the better you are the better everyone around you will be.[152]

151 See for example: Barbara Ridley, Executive Director, Governing Council, Sudbury Cedar Place, Salvation Army, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; Sunder Singh, Executive Director, Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Wanda Polzin-Holman, Clinical Director, Little Warriors, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024.

152 Dawn McIlmoyle, *Briefing for Status of Women Committee (FEWO) Study on Coercive Control*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 16 July 2024.

Many witnesses emphasized that for legislation criminalizing coercive control to be effective, these supports and services should be provided to victims and survivors.[153] Among the types of supports and services that were highlighted by witnesses were the following:

- Housing services including dignified emergency, transition and affordable options, for victims and survivors and their children,[154] and that these facilities accommodate pets;[155]
- Employment and related services, such as skills development;[156]
- Health and medical services,[157] including trauma-informed[158] mental health services that encourage self-esteem and confidence;[159]

153 Carmen Gill, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick, as an individual, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, *Written Brief on Coercive Control Legislation – A Nova Scotia Perspective*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 16 July 2024; Roxana Parsa, Staff Lawyer, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Amy Deschamps, Director, Housing and Gender Based Violence Support Services, YWCA Hamilton, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

154 Linda Lafantaisie Renaud, Executive Director, Horizon Women's Centre, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024; Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024; Salvation Army, *Brief Submission for the Study of Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024; Roxana Parsa, Staff Lawyer, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Amy Deschamps, Director, Housing and Gender Based Violence Support Services, YWCA Hamilton, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

155 Kerri Thomson, Manager, Justice and Legislative Affairs, Human Canada, *Evidence*, 7 October 2024; Roxana Parsa, Staff Lawyer, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

156 Salvation Army, *Brief Submission for the Study of Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024; Sunder Singh, Executive Director, Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Louise Riendeau, Co-responsible for Political Affairs, Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

157 Lisa Pigeau, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Women of the Métis Nation, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024.

158 Shelina Jeshani, Director, Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration, Safe Centre of Peel, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024.

159 Dawn McIlmoyle, *Briefing for Status of Women Committee (FEWO) Study on Coercive Control*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 16 July 2024; Kamal Dhillon, Author and speaker, as an individual, *Evidence*, 7 October 2024; Salvation Army, *Brief Submission for the Study of Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024.

- Financial services to support survivors' financial independence and income supports, including, potentially, a "guaranteed liveable basic income;"[160]

- Legal services and resources related to navigating and accessing the justice system;[161] and

- Other social services, such as those related to child care, transportation, food security and crisis intervention.[162]

Some witnesses highlighted that a criminal law approach may not be appropriate in all cases of coercive control. The experience of going through the criminal justice system in Canada "causes further traumatization to survivors,"[163] further, the system faces systemic issues like racism and discrimination.[164] For those with marginalized and intersecting identities, the criminal justice system's response to these types of offences contributes to revictimization.[165] In its brief, the Ontario Native Women's Association explained:

> Ending violence against Indigenous women requires community-based healing and systemic solutions that address the root causes of violence and coercive control, in addition to legislative changes to criminalize abusive behaviours. This requires an

160 Ending Violence Association of Canada, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Control in Canada Through a Sexualized Violence Lens*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 12 June 2024; Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024; Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs, National Association of Women and the Law, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Roxana Parsa, Staff Lawyer, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Amy Deschamps, Director, Housing and Gender Based Violence Support Services, YWCA Hamilton, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024; Gabrielle Comtois, Policy Analyst, Regroupement québécois des centres d'aides et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

161 See for example: Deepa Mattoo, Executive Director, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024; Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs, National Association of Women and the Law, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Jennifer Koshan, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, as an individual, *Evidence*, 23 May 2024.

162 Lisa Pigeau, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Women of the Métis Nation, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024; Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024.

163 Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland, Nova Scotia, *Coercive Control Brief*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 9 August 2024.

164 Ontario Native Women's Association, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Behaviour*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

165 Ending Violence Association of Canada, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Control in Canada Through a Sexualized Violence Lens*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 12 June 2024.

> intersectional approach – led by Indigenous women and their organizations – that considers the multiple systems that perpetuate violence against Indigenous women, including the policing and justice systems.[166]

The Committee heard that services offered must be culturally sensitive, holistic or wraparound, "lifelong" and offered through a single centralized access point, to ensure that various groups' needs are met.[167] Shelina Jeshani, Director of Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations at Safe Centre of Peel, explained that survivors need services that reduce re-traumatization – such as not requiring victims to repeat their stories over and over – and that are collaborative "cross-sectoral" efforts among social services. She also emphasized that language may be a barrier to accessing these services, particularly for newcomers to Canada, and that this barrier must be taken into account when developing supports and services.[168] The Salvation Army highlighted that some groups have specific needs that should be considered, such as children and youth, as well as individuals in rural and remote communities.[169]

Finally, SAVIS of Halton highlighted the need to provide services that provide children, and other vulnerasble victims of intimate partner and family violence, including coercive control, with safe spaces for reporting and seeking support.[170] Christy Dzikowicz said that children and vulnerable victims of intimate partner and family violence, including coercive control, need "pathways where [they] can come forward…and feel safe walking through the doors." She explained that instead of entering a police station waiting room, "they can come into a space where they're supported by victim advocates from the very beginning of reporting and through the journey."[171] She acknowledged that for some communities, particularly "First Nations communities and newcomer populations," interactions with the justice system and police have been "very negative experiences."

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166 Ontario Native Women's Association, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Behaviour*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, June 2024.

167 See for example: Andrea Silverstone, Chief Executive Officer, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Evidence*, 7 May 2024; Kamal Dhillon, Author and speaker, as an individual, *Evidence*, 7 October 2024; Taylor Briscoe, Assistant Director, Public Affairs, Salvation Army, *Evidence*, 9 May 2024.

168 Shelina Jeshani, Director, Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration, Safe Centre of Peel, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024.

169 Salvation Army, *Brief Submission for the Study of Coercive Behaviour Legislation*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 June 2024; Wanda Polzin-Holman, Clinical Director, Little Warriors, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024.

170 SAVIS of Halton, *Submission on Coercive Control and the use of s.278.1 to subpoena a victim's personal records*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 21 October 2024.

171 Christy Dzikowicz, Chief Executive Officer, Toba Centre for Children and Youth, *Evidence*, 25 September 2024.

She called for the creation of spaces that acknowledge the existence and experiences of systemic racism.[172]

Finally, witnesses called for adequate funding for the provision of the services described above.[173] In its written brief, Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society added that criminalizing coercive control will likely increase the demand on police and the justice system, as such, "a fully funded justice system and wraparound social service is essential to the effective application of the law."[174] The Ending Violence Association of Canada reaffirmed that filling "key funding gaps by sufficiently funding survivor-serving organizations" that work on the frontlines of response and prevention efforts is necessary.[175]

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, provide funding to organizations and service-providers that offer supports to victims and survivors of coercive control and their families, in order to ensure access to ongoing, culturally sensitive and wraparound services, including those related to:

- **emergency and transition shelters and affordable housing;**
- **legal representation and related resources;**
- **employment and skills-development services; and**
- **physical and mental health services that are trauma-informed.**

172 Ibid.

173 Carla Neto, Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024; Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services, *Evidence*, 2 October 2024.

174 Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society, *Coercive Control Legislation: Day One Recommendations for implementing coercive control legislation in Canada*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 9 July 2024.

175 Ending Violence Association of Canada, *Brief on the Criminalization of Coercive Control in Canada Through a Sexualized Violence Lens*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 12 June 2024.

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada provide funding in a way that respects the jurisdiction of and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, to community-based organizations that are led by Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people, that are working to build capacity in Indigenous communities to address intimate partner and family violence, including coercive control, and to support Indigenous women experiencing this violence.

Recommendation 13

The Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, support initiatives with women's shelters whereby a companion animal can be accommodated, within reason.

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, implement integrated, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approaches to protect survivors, including coordinated support across justice, social services, health, and community organizations, considering intersectional risks.

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, provide funding for services that support resources to assist with rehabilitation for coercive behaviors and accountability mechanisms.[176]

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada, while respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples and governments, collect disaggregated data on coercive behaviour, intimate partner violence, and family

176 Carla Neto, Executive Director, Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, *Evidence*, 18 September 2024; Lisa Heslop, Associate, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University, *Evidence*, 23 October 2024.

violence, fund research on racialized and Indigenous communities, and address systemic inequities within the justice system to inform evidence-based policies.

CONCLUSION

The Committee acknowledges the deeply harmful effects that coercive control has on women and their families. Addressing coercive control in Canada will not be accomplished through a single solution. However, lessons learned from other jurisdictions and witness testimony indicate that legislative efforts towards criminalizing this behaviour, in combination with training and education opportunities targeted to different groups, as well as services provided to victims and survivors, would be positive steps towards supporting victims and survivors and addressing and preventing this behaviour in Canada. The Committee is grateful to the victims and survivors who shared their stories and has worked to ensure that these stories become part of the solution in CanPada.

APPENDIX A:
LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's webpage for this study.

44th Parliament – 1st Session

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual Dimitra Pantazopoulos	2024/05/07	107
Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic Deepa Mattoo, Executive Director	2024/05/07	107
Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women Sunder Singh, Executive Director	2024/05/07	107
National Association of Women and the Law Suzanne Zaccour, Director of Legal Affairs	2024/05/07	107
Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society Carrie McManus, Director, Innovation and Programs Andrea Silverstone, Chief Executive Officer	2024/05/07	107
As an individual Carmen Gill, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick	2024/05/09	108
Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak Lisa Pigeau, Director of Intergovernmental Relations	2024/05/09	108
Salvation Army Taylor Briscoe, Assistant Director, Public Affairs Barbara Ridley, Executive Director, Governing Council, Sudbury Cedar Place	2024/05/09	108

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual	2024/05/23	110
Lori Chambers, Professor, Lakehead University		
Jennifer Koshan, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary		
Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale	2024/05/23	110
Karine Barrette, Lawyer and Project Manager		
Louise Riendeau, Co-responsible of Political Affairs		
Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel	2024/05/23	110
Gabrielle Comtois, Policy Analyst		
Women's Legal Education and Action Fund	2024/05/23	110
Roxana Parsa, Staff Lawyer		
YWCA Hamilton	2024/05/23	110
Amy Deschamps, Director, Housing and Gender-Based Violence Support Services		
Coalition of Families Victims of Post-Separation Abuse	2024/09/18	120
Julie Rioux		
Little Warriors	2024/09/18	120
Wanda Polzin-Holman, Clinical Director		
Safe Centre of Peel	2024/09/18	120
Shelina Jeshani, Director, Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration		
Women's Habitat of Etobicoke	2024/09/18	120
Carla Neto, Executive Director		
Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment	2024/09/25	121
Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director		
Horizon Women's Centre	2024/09/25	121
Linda Lafantaisie Renaud, Executive Director		
Juripop	2024/09/25	121
Justine Fortin, Director, Legal Services		
Sophie Gagnon, Executive Director		

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Peel Regional Police	2024/09/25	121
Nick Milinovich, Deputy Chief of Police		
Persons Against Non-State Torture	2024/09/25	121
Linda MacDonald, Co-Founder		
Jeanne Sarson, Co-Founder		
Toba Centre for Children and Youth	2024/09/25	121
Christy Dzikowicz, Chief Executive Officer		
As an individual	2024/10/02	122
Witness-Témoin 1		
Witness-Témoin 2		
Witness-Témoin 3		
Ottawa Victim Services	2024/10/02	122
Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director		
As an individual	2024/10/07	123
Witness-Témoin 1		
Witness-Témoin 2		
Kamal Dhillon, Author and Speaker		
Humane Canada	2024/10/07	123
Kerri Thomson, Manager, Justice and Legislative Affairs		
As an individual	2024/10/23	126
Witness-Témoin 1		
Jean Mercer, Professor Emerita of Psychology, Stockton University		
One Mom's Battle	2024/10/23	126
Tina Swithin, Advocate for Family Court Reform		
Western University	2024/10/23	126
Lisa Heslop, Associate, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children		

APPENDIX B: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's webpage for this study.

44th Parliament – 1st Session

Anonymous Author

Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale

Association pour les femmes et enfants victimes de violence

Aura Freedom International

Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment

Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking

Centre des femmes de Laval

Coalition of Families Victims of Post-Separation Abuse

Dawn Canada

Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland, Nova Scotia

Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick

Ending Violence Association of Canada

Humane Canada

Kaplan, Jennifer

Leonetti, Carrie

Luke's Place

McIlmoyle, Dawn

National Association of Women and the Law

Oberg, Verna

Ontario Native Women's Association

Pantazopoulos, Dimitra

Persons Against Non-State Torture

Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale

Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society

Salvation Army

SAVIS of Halton

Transition House Association of Nova Scotia

Us Too

Women's Shelters Canada

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* (Meetings Nos. 3 to 6 and 9) from the 45th Parliament, 1st Session and (Meetings Nos. 107, 108, 110, 120 to 123 and 126) from the 44th Parliament, 1st Session is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Gladu
Chair

Supplementary Report: Study on Coercive Control

Bloc Québécois

Following the analysis of the initial report on coercive control, several elements warrant adjustment or clarification to ensure greater rigor and coherence with the study's objectives.

One of the main findings concerns the excessive emphasis placed on the notion of parental alienation. Although this concept may, in some cases, be part of dynamics of control or psychological violence, it does not constitute the core of the study. This overrepresentation creates confusion regarding the primary focus of the report. It would therefore be appropriate, for future work, to refocus the analysis exclusively on the subject under study and avoid straying from the defined framework. It should be recalled in this regard that family courts fall under Quebec's jurisdiction, which underscores the need for clear intergovernmental collaboration that respects each level of government's areas of responsibility.

The report also addresses, in an uneven manner, the issue of the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments. It would be important to clarify this point further, notably by distinguishing the federal government's legislative responsibilities — in matters of criminal law and sanctions — from those of the provinces, which include the administration of justice, implementation, prevention, and victim support.

Finally, although several witnesses highlighted the beneficial effects of criminalizing coercive control, these elements are not sufficiently reflected in the current report. It would be desirable to add a section that more fully acknowledges these positive outcomes and emphasizes that, in jurisdictions where such a measure has been adopted, none have expressed a desire to reverse it. Highlighting this point would strengthen the report's credibility and provide a more comprehensive and balanced reading. Moreover, in numerous other studies conducted in parallel with the committee's work, the call for the criminalization of coercive control consistently emerges as one of the main recommendations.