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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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● (0805)

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study on violence against aboriginal women. We're here today to do exactly that, and we would like to hear everything you have to say. You will have to keep it a bit short; you only have seven minutes to present. What you don't get to include in your presentation, you might be able to include in the question and answer period afterwards. So don't be too upset.

We're going to start with Mike Bartkus. You have seven minutes.

Staff Sergeant Mike Bartkus (Domestic Offender Crimes Section, Edmonton Police Service): Good morning, everybody. Thanks for having us attend this particular committee.

Domestic violence is a major concern for the Edmonton Police Service and the community, affecting all aspects of society. Violence in the home is a leading cause of injury, and children who grow up witnessing this violence are often affected for life. The EPS is committed to providing the most appropriate and effective response to domestic violence.

Edmonton Police Service members are consistently reminded that some victims might require more information and assistance specific to their situation and that in some cases unique specialized support may exist.

The following are examples of concerns aboriginal victims might have and/or misunderstandings: resources may be limited; a support system may be in the specific community in which they live; the suspect could be an important member of the community; the suspect may have possession of the family home; suspicion about the justice system may discourage many aboriginal people from viewing it as a viable option; victims may be reluctant to send a suspect into a system that is viewed as racist; many victims in cases of domestic violence fear police will apprehend their children; and in some communities, culturally appropriate services may be limited or not exist at all.

Within the Edmonton Police Service, our policy defines domestic violence as any use of physical or sexual force, actual or threatened, in an intimate relationship. It may include a single act of violence or a number of acts forming a pattern of abuse through the use of assaultive and controlling behaviour. The pattern of abuse may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, stalking, and threats to harm children, other family members, pets, and property. The mandate of the Edmonton Police Service's domestic offender crimes section is to provide a timely response to the investigation of serious or complex cases of domestic violence and to provide victim-based intervention and advocacy services cooperatively with partnering agencies.

Understanding that intimate partner violence is one of the most common and potentially lethal problems dealt with by police, the domestic offender crimes section endeavours to apply risk and threat assessment strategies identifying important victim vulnerability factors in each case.

Some of the risk-enhancing factors, which we consider but do not limit ourselves to, include the following: a lengthy history, both with regard to the relationship as well as offender-specific; victims, including children, who are fearful; a significant or imminent risk of harm; issues that are culturally sensitive; a recent breakup, separation, or divorce; high-risk stalking behaviours; criminal harassment and/or breach of a court order; mental health concerns and/or a pattern of irrational or violent behaviour; recommendations from the Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre, I-TRAC, respecting a safety plan or offender considerations or concerns; concerns from other sources, including community agencies that have intimate knowledge of the victims or the offenders; and concerns and recommendations from the crown.

Briefly, our investigative response starts with patrol divisions that are responsible for the initial response in all cases of domestic violence. If doing so is deemed necessary, a detective from the domestic offender crimes section can respond and assume the primary role of the investigation. Detectives from DOCS are available on a call-out basis for incidents that occur outside of their normal working hours, and the assigned on-call DOCS detective is available 24/7 for consultation on domestic violence issues or concerns. There are five detectives assigned to the domestic offender crimes section within the city of Edmonton.

With regard to advocacy and intervention initiatives, the Edmonton Police Service and the City of Edmonton community services department have established intervention details to provide services to individuals involved in domestic violence. The details comprise a divisional constable and a registered social worker. The details are responsible for the review and assessment of intimate partner domestic violence cases. Registered social workers assigned to the details may perform a risk assessment on selected cases. Intervention is tailored to meet the individual needs of the victim and/or offender of domestic violence. Intervention may include further investigative strategies addressing issues or concerns not highlighted in the original investigative report; developing a comprehensive safety plan with the victim and proactively working with other divisional members, victims services unit, and other community agencies in an effort to provide appropriate responses to cases of intimate partner domestic violence. There are five domestic violence intervention teams that work under the domestic offender crimes section.

● (0810)

Decisions to provide intervention may be based on but not limited to the following risk-enhancing factors: incidents involving repeat calls for service relating to couples in an intimate partner relationship; reports of domestic violence where no charges have been laid; and domestic violence cases where a common assault or assault causing bodily harm with or without a weapon charge has been laid; or in any of the above situations where children are present and exposed to domestic violence; cultural sensitivity issues, patterns of violence or abuse, including threats that appear to be escalating; financial strain; addictions and/or other stress factors; and the age of the victim or offender is under 21 years of age.

Public education is provided by the domestic violence intervention team members to a variety of professionals in agencies, services, and institutions. These include hospitals, post-secondary programs, schools, ethnic associations, churches, neighbourhood groups, business groups, and others.

The domestic violence docket court is a team that we also have within our section, and it is comprised of a constable and a City of Edmonton social worker. They attend domestic violence docket court daily in Edmonton. In consultation with the assigned crown prosecutors, the teams will review cases and perform the following duties: interview victims, the accused, family members, defence counsel, and other community agencies; assess concerns regarding family dynamics, release conditions, and counselling services, which may be required for the victim and/or accused; make appropriate risk-reducing recommendations regarding the victim, release conditions, and any other variances in previous court orders; follow up with other assisting agencies and coordinate plans for family reconciliation and safety.

Under our section we also have the elder abuse intervention team. That team is comprised of a constable from the Edmonton Police Service, a social worker from the City of Edmonton community services department, a Victorian Order of Nurses nurse, and Catholic Social Services. The team is responsible for assessing information from investigative reports about elderly adults aged 65 years of age and older to determine if they are in an abusive situation or care, and if required, provide intervention.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Could you please wrap it up very quickly?

● (0815)

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: Certainly.

In closing, I'd like to say that the Edmonton Police Service obviously takes domestic violence cases very seriously. We work with the community collectively to end the cycle of violence against women.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you.

Now we have Josie Nepinak from The Awo Taan Healing Lodge in Calgary.

Ms. Josie Nepinak (Executive Director, Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society): I'm from the Awo Taan Healing Lodge in Calgary, a 27-bed emergency shelter for abused women and children. We provide a broad continuum of support services guided by aboriginal traditional teachings—including prevention, intervention, and healing—to anyone affected by any form of violence.

There are two components to our program. First, we have the residential program, which is a 27-bed, full-service emergency shelter. We operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We have a 24-hour crisis line. We provide emergency health care—we have a nurse practitioner on board with us—as well as health intervention. We provide a child support program, transportation and meals, and cultural and elder support.

In our non-residential programs we provide outreach. Outreach is for moms and children who have left the shelter and are transitioning back into the community for healthier, violence-free lives. We provide a youth and family program. This is an early intervention program for our youth and pre-teens, which looks at healthy relationships, including dating relationships. We have an anti-bullying program with our partner school, Piitoayis Family School. We have a triple-P parenting program. We have healing and peer support circles for women, men, and children. We have a cultural enrichment program, as well as an elder support program.

We all know that the extent of violence against aboriginal women is huge. I took this quote from Dr. James Waldram to further enhance this point:

> Among the most serious health problems affecting Aboriginal people in the decades since the end of the Second World War...are injuries sustained as a result of accidents and violence.

As for a definition of family violence, I wanted to bring it from a historical perspective to contextualize the reality of aboriginal women today. Family violence is a consequence of colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural genocide, the learned negative multi-generational actions, values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavioural patterns practised to weaken the aboriginal people.

In 2001 there were just under half a million aboriginal women in Canada, representing 3% of the total female population. I won't go into the statistics because we've already heard some of those.

One of the other points I wanted to make is that a research project by the Canada West Foundation stated that more aboriginal people live in urban centres than on reserves, especially in western Canada. Two-thirds of urban aboriginal people live in western Canada, primarily in Winnipeg, Regina, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver.

I won't talk about the various barriers faced by aboriginal women. Rather, I will move on to the Awo Taan Healing Lodge and the composition of our clients coming in. In the past 10 years, we have served 2,500 women in the emergency shelter alone; that's not counting our other programs, which I mentioned earlier. Our statistics show that approximately 50% of the women coming in have been first nations women. What that means is that the burden of the service needs of first nations and aboriginal women coming into the city is on some of our aboriginal organizations. There is a need to increase support and funding for our agencies.

In the province of Alberta, from March 2009 to March 31, 2010, Alberta domestic violence centres, including Awo Taan, accommodated 6,169 women and 5,601 children provincially. That's among 43 emergency shelters in the province of Alberta.

● (0820)

In that same year, the shelters were unable to accommodate 10,364 women and 6,474 children. We know for sure, from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' statistics, that 67% of the women entering emergency shelters in this province are aboriginal women.

I just gave you the number of the women and children that we've turned away. We think approximately 17,000 people were turned away in Alberta, and 67% of those are aboriginal women and children. What does that mean? What about the women who are not accessing shelters? Where is their safety? Where are their cultural supports? Where are their healing places to go to?

We are severely lacking supports and services for aboriginal women in this province, and I'm sure across the country as well. Our statistics indicate that the rural and urban migration is increasing at a rapid rate, yet the dollars are not matching the needs for service. Therefore, we can assume from these numbers that thousands of aboriginal women in this province are not receiving the care, the intervention, and the safety required to live violent-free lives in this province.

My recommendation from the Awo Taan Healing Lodge, based on the 20 years of service that we have put into advocacy for aboriginal women, is to develop a comprehensive strategy to develop a research agenda for aboriginal women and children. This would take a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to the issue of violence against aboriginal women.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you very much, Josie.

We now have the Métis Child and Family Services Society, with Donald Langford and Kari Thomason.

Who is going to speak?

Mr. Donald Langford (Executive Director, Métis Child and Family Services Society): I will, Chair.

Good morning. I am the executive director of the Métis Child and Family Services Society in Edmonton. Our agency delivers 10 community programs to the citizens of this city, specifically to the aboriginal community.

Violence against aboriginal women begins at an early age. We deliver 10 programs. I'll speak about five of those programs because they affect violence, certainly family violence and violence against individuals at all levels.

We look after the aboriginal family violence program in Edmonton. Kari is one of the outreach workers. She also works with our SNUG and community outreach program on the street. In that program we have currently more than 430 women on our database, working girls. We try to provide the best support we can to them.

We also work with the protection of sexually exploited children—this program was formerly called protection of children involved in prostitution—and we've been involved in this program since 1998. Unfortunately, many of these girls, who we started working with at ages 14, 15, and 16, are now adults of 24, 25, and 26 who are on the street and can't exit that lifestyle.

Our aboriginal child and family support program provides in-home family services, and we've been doing this for about 25 years.

The other program we deliver is foster care. That's the most troubling one in our community right now because 65% of the children in care in this province are aboriginal.

We also deliver what I call the Choices school program, where we hope to keep our children in school and make life a little easier for them. We have five registered social workers working in five public junior high schools.

Each of our programs deals with the different issues and allows us to work with all groups in the community that experience instances of violence, from the girls on the street to moms and children in the family as well as children and youth in the schools and the community. In the last 21 months we've served more than 700 families that have experienced issues of family violence of one kind or another. We've documented 745 cases of physical abuse, 253 cases of sexual abuse, as well as financial abuse and spiritual abuse. Also, more than 200 of our girls on the streets have experienced physical abuse and beatings in the last two years. In fact, in the last two days—that's why we're running a little bit late—we've been conducting a street outreach program with our partners from the city police, and seven of the girls who were brought in that we had interviewed and tried to provide some support to had reported bad dates where they'd been beaten. The strange part was that only one chose to lay charges and report the incident. And I think it took Kari some time just to convince her that maybe she should report it, because not only was she beaten but she was cut up.

Last year we did a research project funded by Public Safety and interviewed more than 309 working girls. Our findings on that really didn't surprise us. We found that they were all abused at a young age by a family member or friend. Currently, all are abusing drugs. They said that it was these two factors that really allowed them to be coerced or forced or persuaded to do the life on the streets.

We have provided support and help to all of these individuals as best we can over the past 25 years. Unfortunately, it's not getting any better. There's lots of work and lots of support that needs to be done in this field and there's lots of opportunity at the front line. Unfortunately, there are lots of people who want to advocate for our community. They like to meet, they like to talk, they like to plan, but it doesn't appear that they want to get down and actually do the front-line work. I find this frustrating as a member of our community because resources and funding are very limited.

● (0825)

Not a day goes by that we don't have some individual who has been beaten, has had her house ripped up, and has had her possessions taken. Then she has to go back to try to find support or help within the community.

We commend the city police, because they have worked very diligently with all of our units and agencies in the city, but we need other supports. For example, if you're given a move or they help you move and relocate, you can only do that once.

I had a case last week where a women's mate had come in, beaten her up, thrown her out, smashed up her house, and left the water running. We tried to get her relocated, but because she had already had one relocation three years ago they would not consider it again.

Those are some of the issues that affect our community, and they're not getting any better.

We're prepared to answer questions later on.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you very much.

Madam Jo-Anne Hansen is going to entertain us, I believe.

Ms. Jo-Anne Hansen (Representative, Little Warriors): That's my job, hey?

My name is Jo-Anne Hansen. I'm a registered social worker and I own a little company called The Spirit of Healing. I'm here to represent Little Warriors. Little Warriors is an organization that's pretty new, and it's to support victims of sexual abuse.

I'm from northern Alberta. My father was Carl Frank Hansen-Halcrow, and my grandmother was Sarah Halcrow. I'm passionate about this work because of where she came from. My grandmother married my grandfather when she was very young, 16 years old, when she was stripped of her treaty status. She was beaten pretty much until she died at 47 years old. I'm here to represent my heritage. I'm first nations, Métis, myself.

Seven minutes isn't very long, so I have only two things to address that I've learned from my counselling with residential school victims—because that's what I do. One is codependency. Codependency is the key and probably worst effect of residential schools, because children were forced to keep the peace just to survive. It doesn't surprise me that there's so much abuse in aboriginal communities because of that. The other key that's important is bullying. I learned a long time ago that the only way to protect yourself against others is to know yourself well enough so that others can't use you against yourself.

I wanted to make an impact from a traditional perspective using my music, so I wrote this song to address that. There will be little bits and pieces where you'll see that I imagine my grandmother being beaten and then trying to figure out how she was going to survive the next day. I wrote this song for that.

Bear with me. I've never done this before in public—not this way, anyway. But it's very important to me, so I'll take a few chances and see what happens:

In the night after I wake up,
And feel the teardrops in my eyes,
For a moment I am startled,
What's in dreams that made me cry?

So I crash through the shadows,
Stumble through the empty halls
Turn the radio on softly
I want to make sense of it all.

Call into the night, hear the voices.
Hurting image on the wall.
Each is my memories, echoing I am nothing at all.
The images are scaring me, like I have no control.
Don't forget they are just shadows; they don't have any power at all!

So I crash through the shadows,
Stumble through the empty halls
Try to find a warm steady heart beat,
In the cold, steel concrete walls

The steel guitar is screaming
Stings the center of my soul
Overwhelmed that I am not dreaming, fighting my way to stand up tall.
The struggle is drowning a voice of reason;
The tears are me believing
That all this is me! "Realizing," that it "Really, isn't me, at all!!!"

So I crash through the shadows,
Stumble through the empty halls
Turn the radio on softly
I want to make sense of it all.

Then the voice starts with humming, harmony to my soul
Resonating a common moment as she takes my hand in her palm.
Saying, "It's not your home, not your friends nor your lover,
The truth is it's in your song."
"We all need a little help.
When our walk feels like a crawl!!!"

I'm not crazy, I am healing and can rise above despair!
This is real and I'm not dreaming!
The truth is, "I really care!"

I'm not crazy, I am healing and can rise above despair!
The tears are real, and I'm not dreaming
The truth is, "I really care!"

● (0830)

● (0835)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you very much.

We'll go to questions now. It will be a seven-minute round, starting with Ms. Neville from the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all very much for being here this morning. We've been travelling the country with this committee, and I think all of us have been quite overwhelmed by what we've heard. We're realizing that what we have taken on is significantly more than we might have anticipated.

Ms. Hansen, thank you. This morning you captured something in your song that other words have not been able to bring together. Thank you very much.

I'm not sure quite where to begin; I have lots of questions.

Ms. Nepinak, you indicated that you have a number of statistics that you aren't going to read into the record. Will you ensure that our clerk gets them so we have them for the report and the discussions that will follow? That will be very helpful, thank you.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Absolutely.

Hon. Anita Neville: I want to start with the police. I hope I won't be rude; I don't mean to be.

We have been hearing almost everywhere we've gone about the systemic racism of institutions in dealing with aboriginal women—their fear of going to the police, non-aboriginal organizations, and social service organizations for help.

One community I was in—not the committee—told me that their women did not feel they had any protection from their police force. From what you've presented today, you're clearly making an effort. You have a comprehensive outline of programs and activities.

What are you doing differently? Would you say that there are people who will not come to you because of fear of racism? If so, how are you dealing with that?

I'm not sure of the question to ask. I want to know what you're doing, because on paper you seem to have a lot going on.

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: Yes, we recognize this as being an issue, and that's what keeps us going.

We prepared an environmental scan for the Edmonton Police Service in 2010 and recognized some of the Canadian Centre for Justice statistics. It's quite appalling in terms of what is actually happening out there. We had 6,500 cases of domestic violence that we responded to as an organization last year. We're well aware of the issues—

● (0840)

Hon. Anita Neville: What portion of those, Staff Sergeant, were aboriginal women? Do you keep those statistics?

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: That's why I brought Nancy along: in case somebody asks a statistics question. Nancy can probably fill you in on where we sit with that. Just so you understand, because we are so focused on working with the community and in partnership, we see the success of collaboration. An example is working in communities such as CIAFV—Community Initiatives Against Family Violence—which includes 99 community victim-servicing linking agencies within the greater Edmonton area. We're a proud member of that organization, and we work on a regular basis with different groups to address the issues surrounding marginalized women in our community. Today Family Violence Help Centre is a co-located facility that we're in membership with as well. That's for drop-ins, for people who don't want to go to the police organization.

Hon. Anita Neville: Did you say "co-located"?

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: It's a co-located facility, and it's called the Today Family Violence Help Centre. Again, we're a part of that. Social services is a part of that. A number of other community agencies come together. It's in the downtown core, and it takes walk-ins. It does referrals. There are phone numbers of people to contact if they don't want to deal with a policing agency per se from the beginning of when they want to tell their stories.

Nancy, maybe you could talk a little about the reasons we can't bring you stats in terms of....

Ms. Nancy Leake (Criminal Intelligence Analyst, Serious Crimes Branch, Edmonton Police Service): Right now the Edmonton Police Service is not mandated to collect race information when they're filling out a police report, so in 2010 only 13% of all police-related occurrences had a race populated for at least one person involved in the incident. We do collect race information for people involved in hate/bias crimes, but because we're not mandated to collect the information, it is very sparsely populated in our record management system. When race does exist in a person record, we do not have a way of knowing whether the person self-reported to the police officer at the time of the incident what race they were identifying with or whether the officer used visual characteristics and his or her own opinion to populate the race information. So without knowing how the race information got entered and without being mandated to collect that information for every person involved in a police occurrence, we do not have the capability at this time to report any statistics on the percentage of aboriginal women who are victimized by domestic violence.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do I have time?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): You have about 40 seconds.

Hon. Anita Neville: I'll continue with the police for a minute.

Do you have a significant number of aboriginal officers?

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: Actually, we do. One of my best friends is an inspector with the Edmonton Police Service. He's actually my neighbour. He is the driving force behind some of the initiatives that we're attempting in our organization as we speak.

Demographically, most of my section is made up of females. On my domestic violence intervention team, one female social worker and one female constable are aboriginal. We pride ourselves on having that connection, and it's always in the back of our minds in terms of improving that situation as well.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do you share best practices—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): I'm sorry, but your time is up. I know; it's so hard, isn't it?

Now we go to Madam Demers from the Bloc Québécois.

Go ahead, Nicole, whenever you feel ready.

● (0845)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thanks very much to our witnesses for being here today. This is our last stop, but probably the most emotional. I do not know if whether it is the fatigue, or whether we have seen so many people, but I know that you have played a part in it, Ms. Hansen. Your song put us all on an equal footing this morning. You opened our hearts. If we really want to solve the problem of violence against aboriginal women, I believe that we will not do so with our heads but with our hearts. Because of you, we are speaking from our hearts now, not from our heads, and I thank you for that.

Mr. Langford, I appreciated your testimony very much. But, at the same time, I despair when I see that children who were involved in prostitution 10 years ago are still involved in it today. What makes 14- and 15-year-old children become involved in prostitution, and stay involved, for such a long time? Why is there no way out of this problem? Why?

[*English*]

Ms. Kari Thomason (Community Outreach Worker, Métis Child and Family Services Society): There is. We do have a program called PSECA, which is to try to disengage the individuals out of prostitution. But the sad, unfortunate reality is that we have girls who are second and third generation from family members coming down, and for a lot of them, because of the high capacity of sexual abuse they endured at very young ages, the horrible attitude and concept in their world is, "I never had an opportunity. I never said I wanted to lose my virginity. I did not want to become a prostitute. But when you're violated over and over again, you might as well start to charge for it rather than give it away for free."

That was the mentality. We've reshaped it in many forms where those gals who started at such a young age unfortunately just could not shake the whole reality of being able to square up their lives. It was a scary world, and they felt there was very little support. But we do have programs to help our underage ones, and also the over-18 ones, the program that I assist with running as well.

Many of these gals don't feel they're worth enough to be anything other than working out on the streets and being degraded. Many of them don't believe they're worthy of getting compliments, worthy of being treated with respect. So it's something that we as a group are constantly doing, reinforcing that they need self-empowerment. It's extremely detrimental within their teachings...so we do have many capacities where we intervene.

It's not always under an arrest where we deal with these women. When we are doing the streets it's literally to see how they are doing—if there have been any bad dates, if there have been any occurrences of violence.

The changeover has been overwhelming. I will honestly say that 10 years ago we never had women reporting bad dates. There was a trust factor between the police and the individuals who were working. Literally we have built a bridge where the officers are being requested by the working girls who have been assaulted, saying that there is enough trust now that they are actually reporting bad dates to them. Where we never had that 10 years ago, we have an overabundance now, which is self-empowering.

For the women who do leave, we have peer supports on those nights of operational and non-operational nights to let the girls know, "Yes, you are worthy. You can make it. I did."

So we do have success cases, but unfortunately for those who.... you know, their demise was unfortunately met out there. I personally have two family members who are still missing. We are presuming that they've been killed, or that they're no longer with us, due to the lifestyle of prostitution.

● (0850)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you.

Ms. Nepinak, what form would you like to see a multidisciplinary approach take?

[*English*]

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Thank you for the question. That would include health care, justice, shelter, a cultural program, and education. That would include systems that have historically been involved with aboriginal people, including our spiritual leaders in our communities as well, and the development of a comprehensive strategy to address the areas.

We do have a medical clinic right in our facility, and one of the issues we have seen at Awo Taan in Calgary is that of the women who are coming into the shelter, 75% have not seen a medical doctor in six months. We have children who have not been immunized. We have multiple health issues involving ear, throat, nose, upper respiratory, gastrointestinal. So a multidisciplinary approach would include all of those areas. Another piece would be around the research.

The issue of family violence is very broad, and I think as far as identifying what the need is goes, it's safe to say there are many at the moment. But it is such a huge issue, how do we then chunk the work out so that it is possible to do it?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Time's up. I'm sorry.

Now we go to Ms. Grewal from the Conservatives.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and I would like to thank all the witnesses for their time.

My question goes to the RCMP. As you know, the family prevention initiative is a long-term commitment of the Government of Canada to address violence within relationships of kinship, intimacy, dependency, or trust, and the Public Health Agency of Canada leads and coordinates the FVI, the family violence initiative, which leads and coordinates with the 15 partners or departments. I think the RCMP is also a part of this initiative. I would like to know more about your work concerning the family prevention initiative.

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: We're with the Edmonton Police Service. I'll just correct you on that piece.

This is a federal program you're speaking about?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Yes, it's a federal program.

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: And it's the family...sorry?

● (0855)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: It's the family violence initiative. So it's the family prevention initiative coordinated all over Canada. I just want to know something more about what you are doing.

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: We work on a provincial level with our counterparts in a police advisory committee that addresses family violence issues on a regular basis. We're always looking at ways and means of enhancing the acts that we work under and bringing in more advocacy and collaboration from other agencies. It's a work in progress, but we are a part of that. We partner with the people we need to partner with, and we speak on a provincial level, and we speak on a national level. So for the people who are involved in this type of work, it's a close-knit community. We all obviously have the same sorts of issues and problems that we deal with on a regular basis, on a national level. So best practices are shared, and obviously work continues. We're in it for the long term.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I see.

My other question is to the RCMP. I understand that part of the problem we have is the lack of national data on aboriginal violence, as you have stated before. But is there a way we can address not having that data?

Ms. Nancy Leake: We don't have the availability of the race information, but it is something we're recognizing. Even though some may view it as a prejudicial measure for officers to collect that information when investigating, it is an important piece of information that helps us support the marginalized groups of people in the right way—by knowing who they identify with, what race they identify with. Right now we're just trying to figure out the best strategy as a police service to try to collect that information, without giving any offence to people, but making them realize that it is for the support we would like to offer them.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Madam Chair, is there more time left?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): You have a lot of time.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I see.

Then here is my question for all of you: what's the main root of family violence?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Thank you.

On the main root, the research and the literature support the fact that colonization and assimilation policies have contributed greatly to the issue of family violence in our aboriginal communities. Colonization, as we know, is the forced destruction—for lack of better words, I guess—of aboriginal families and forcing children into residential schools as well. Residential schools have stripped away the spirit of the child—or have attempted to—in removing that child from, in many cases, a nurturing and loving environment.

We see the multi-generational legacy of the residential school. For example, I am a fourth-generation person who has been impacted by the residential school, but I have, however, built up some resilience to the issue.

In addition, policies, programs, and supports for aboriginal families have not met the issues in a way that is conducive to promoting family functioning, healing, and wellness in our aboriginal communities.

Up until recently, aboriginal women have not had culturally appropriate services for family violence in this country. Awo Taan Healing Lodge in Calgary has in the past 20 years developed programming that is framed from within what we call a "western" methodology as well as a cultural enrichment program. By combining the two interventions, we're finding that aboriginal women and their families—and their partners—are healing and moving towards a more violence-free life.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Do any others have any thoughts?

Mr. Donald Langford: I think the biggest thing right now is poverty.

I think this is a great sitting, because my boarding school, when I was in care, was just kitty-corner from here. Ironically, that's where they built children's services.

I come from a family of residential school survivors. My wife went into residential school when she was six and came out at 14. I think the thing is that it's continuing today with the apprehensions and foster care.

Personally, I can relate to these children, because once you are apprehended, no matter how your family is and whatnot, you do feel that sense of abandonment. You feel that sense of betrayal. You feel that sense of loss. Ironically, all of these kids in care, when they finally age out, go home. So something is wrong with that picture. They have to quit apprehending our kids and they have to start working with our families.

It's in those families where the family violence starts. It's frustration. It's poverty. It's addictions. You know, you use what you've got.... And they're all depressed.

● (0900)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I'll give a chance to someone else.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Now we'll go to the NDP, with Ms. Jean Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses. I particularly want to thank Ms. Hansen. I think Ms. Demers is absolutely correct that one of the ways we can perhaps open another door is through music. The information we're being presented with is not new information. What you are telling us, we're hearing.... I haven't been part of the panel, but I'm the aboriginal affairs critic for the NDP, and of course I'm very familiar with the issues around violence against aboriginal women. One of the things that often gets left out of this conversation, and you have mentioned it, is that violence against aboriginal women is not just against aboriginal women; it's against children, it's against the families, and it's against all the relatives. One of you talked about codependency. The stats on codependency, of course, say that for every person who is touched, there are at least seven other people who are influenced by this.

Ms. Nepinak touched on the issues around assimilation, colonialism, and cultural genocide. Mr. Langford added to that by talking about foster care. Many people believe that what we are actually doing is continuing that pattern of assimilation, colonialism, and cultural genocide through the foster care system. For the province where I live, British Columbia, 52% of the children in care are aboriginal children. And we know about the overrepresentation in prison of aboriginal people, particularly in western Canada.

With those depressing stats, what I'd like to do is ask each organization to tell the committee of one or two key things that you think are immediate and pressing that we need to take on.

I'll start with Ms. Hansen.

Ms. Jo-Anne Hansen: Like I said before, the two issues that I think stem from residential schools—I have to agree with my colleagues—is that we have codependency issues. That means that here we have children in residential schools who were stripped of their identity, their culture, and their language. The other part of it is the bullying issue.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Ms. Hansen, can you give us some specifics? If this committee were to go away and write a report and say, we think the government should do *x*...what do you think the government should do to take on those issues?

Ms. Jo-Anne Hansen: We need to focus more on the healing aspect. I agree with having programs like this, province-wide. I'm glad you have one here. But we need to focus on the healing aspects so that aboriginal women and children, or whoever is being abused, can embrace their culture and who they are.

I'm a professional counsellor. I see aboriginal people transformed in front of my face when they start to identify. You know, we are human beings. We have a culture. Actually, the language embraces that culture. It's a living language. More programs like that need to be done. I'm talking about first nations people talking to first nations people—like myself. I come here and I use my music. It was a little bit scary, but at the same time that's who I am. That's who I am as an aboriginal woman. I do it through my music, my language, and my culture. I would not be at that place if I didn't have that healing, that contact.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

Mr. Langford.

Mr. Donald Langford: We live in the aboriginal community. I think we know just about every aboriginal person we read about in the newspapers. We have to start working with the families. We have to start with the individuals. We have to provide that support to them. We're not doing enough of that. That's where it has to start. It has to start at a young age.

We have great early childhood programs—Success by 6, Aboriginal Head Start—but we lose that when they go to grade one. We have nothing after Success by 6. We have to stay connected with these children because we have to start with the young generation. A good example is when they brought the dental program into Saskatchewan many years ago, they started it at grade one. So everybody in grade one got a dental exam and their teeth fixed. Then they maintained them when they went to grade two, grade three, and grade four, and everybody else who came in at grade one received services. In 12 years they had a complete, dentally fit group of young adults.

I think you can introduce programs like that. You have to find a base place to start. The base place is with the very young, because little children.... I have 10 grandchildren. They're very honest; they tell me everything. They tell their teachers everything. Once we engage the families of the young children, then we have to stay with them and provide that family support. When you maintain relationships, it's relationships that are key. You have to build that relationship with that parent and that family and maintain it.

● (0905)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

Ms. Nepinak, you've talked about the comprehensive strategy. Could you give us a specific starting point? If we were to go away tomorrow and start something, what would it look like?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Thank you.

I believe one of the areas I would certainly look at is developing community capacity. I believe that any community, whether it's a very remote and isolated community or a major urban centre such as Calgary, should be resourced and equipped, staffed, and financially resourced to build the community from ground zero, so that aboriginal families learn the skills to.... I should go back and say that most families have those skills. But how do we support families and communities, including our elected officials, to work together to begin to talk about the issue of family violence?

Family violence in our aboriginal communities continues to be a very painful subject. Many of our leaders are not talking about the issue, and we need ambassadors from our leadership to talk about family violence and to build communities that are adequately resourced.

We receive families from many remote and isolated communities from across the province, from Saskatchewan and across the country. Taking these families from their cultural community and bringing them into a jungle like Calgary is very traumatic and difficult for them.

Another thing I would recommend very quickly is that the three levels of government—the federal government, the provincial government, as well as the municipal government—need to talk to each other to support these initiatives and strategies that are happening, because we need to move away from the jurisdictional issues and be able to challenge that as well, to say that our women are dying—they're dying on the streets, they're dying wherever they are—and we need to take some action around it.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Josie. Your time is up. Sorry.

Now we go to five minutes, and we'll be starting with Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you again.

Ms. Nepinak, you ended where I was going to begin in terms of the interjurisdictional issues.

Mr. Langford, one of the things that I was particularly interested in that you commented on in your opening remarks was the fact that you have social workers in the public education system.

I have spent many years involved in the Winnipeg school division as a board member, and I have been very immersed in aboriginal matters. While the school system has its own social work component, it does not have—and I may be out of date—an aboriginal-based agency providing support to it in a very concrete way.

Could you tell us a little bit about that? It might be something we can build on.

Mr. Donald Langford: We've been running our Choices school program for 17 years now. We have aboriginal social workers. They're in the five highest needs schools in the city, where there are large numbers of aboriginal children. We provide a morning snack, and it allows the children who have issues or difficulties to come and get a snack and maybe talk to the social worker and set up a chance to come back and discuss what's bothering them. A lot of it is family violence—addictions issues, peer pressure, run-ins with the law, the justice system—but we do a lot of cultural stuff.

Right now in my five schools I've had a couple of young aboriginal role models, James Jones and Linsay Willier, the next best model in Canada, who is on that dance program. They're aboriginal and they go into the schools and do an hour and a half presentation to the kids, just to show them what is possible. James is a graduate of Amiskwaciy Academy, which is the aboriginal high school in the city here.

There are lots of these little aboriginal programs and cultural ceremonies, and jigging. We teach jigging. I have a music teacher. We have over 200 students. We teach fiddle and guitar in five different schools. We teach it three days in the office and we do an outreach program at Sacred Heart Church. If you want to learn fiddle and guitar, it's free. We'll give you a little meal. We'll teach you how to jig. That's part of the culture.

In Aboriginal Week we set up our teepee and our aboriginal tent at all these schools, and we bring our jiggers. We have the world champion junior jiggers out of our office—and they jig.

We do a lot of that cultural stuff to get the kids interested.

● (0910)

Hon. Anita Neville: I just want to follow up with the police department and continue with Jean Crowder's question on your number one or two recommendation for the federal government.

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: We spend 80% to 90% of our time as police officers going into people's homes. We spend an inordinate amount of money on gangs and drugs.

Hon. Anita Neville: And prisons—

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: Correct. We need to take some proactive steps. We need to look at risk and threat assessment. We need to look at safety planning and witness protection. We need to educate our members to be better police officers and understand the social complexities of some of these investigations we're dealing with on a day-to-day basis. It's not like you see on TV; we spend a lot of time talking to people. We have to be prepared to listen to them and help them solve their problems.

Hon. Anita Neville: Are you saying it's a matter of resources?

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: It's a matter of resources and allocating funds to provide us with the tools and the necessary strategies to help people who are involved with family violence issues—to get in front of it so it doesn't become such a big, inordinate problem for us.

Again, it's a revolving door, a revolving cycle. There are breach issues. We spend an inordinate amount of time on these investigations and arresting people, only to find that they're released back into the community and breaching conditions continually. There are no preventative measures for the victim or the offender himself. Maybe he or she wants to make those changes. What can they do in the meantime prior to a trial, or something along those lines? The conditions that are just generalized and brought out for every case are inadequate. We have to look at it on a case-by-case basis, build upon it, and make it customized for the issues we're dealing with, for the family we're dealing with.

We are very busy. My section is very small and I need more people.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you very much, Mike.

Thank you, Ms. Neville.

Now we'll go to the Conservatives and Ms. Grewal for five minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Jo-Anne.

I'm very proud of the work done by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Can you highlight some of the success stories for me? How has your organization provided mental health and emotional support to former students and their families?

Ms. Jo-Anne Hansen: For me the biggest gap seems to be in the spirit of healing counselling program I have. There's not enough funding for front-line workers to work directly with aboriginal people who are survivors of the residential schools.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation is slowing down now and closing things down, but we still have IAP clients who are coming to do their settlements. There's a huge gap in support for those people, with their lawyer, with their families, because the IAP process has opened up a wound and there's no support for those people. That's affecting families.

I can name several people who have not survived due to suicide. Their addictions have increased because of this wound that has opened from the IAP.

I appreciate the funding I've been given to continue to support IAP clients. I am very proud to have been a part of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. But there needs to be more support for those clients and their families, because a lot of people are being hurt out there due to this process.

● (0915)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: To each one of you, since we are dealing with this very serious problem of violence against aboriginal women, do you have any suggestions on how we can deal with this problem collectively as a society?

Ms. Jo-Anne Hansen: I think there needs to be more education of front-line workers, and more money should be paid to them. It's like the family-school liaison counsellors in the schools. Even though they're first nations, they get paid very little—$30,000. So we don't get really good-quality counsellors for front-line workers.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Right.

Kari, do you have any suggestions on that?

Ms. Kari Thomason: It really needs to start in the home. It really does—giving support. Rather than removing kids, we need to work with them in the home to keep them as a unit. Once you remove the kids, you remove all of what is supposed to be traditional, keeping together. Once you remove them, basically they're no longer able to identify with our cultural background.

We're short on foster parents as it is. Aboriginal foster parents are very hard to find to carry on some of the beliefs and traditions that the kids were not taught by their parents. When they're in care, they're still able to receive that.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Donald.

Mr. Donald Langford: Well, I think everybody knows what they have to do to get their act together. As workers with these families, we have to let them decide what they want to do and then support them the best way we can. I find the problem right now is that once the children are apprehended, they forget the families, and the families are allowed to do what they've been doing wrong.

The way we work in homes.... Sometimes we've got to kick butt. Sometimes you've got to sit them down and say, “Get your bloody act together. Smarten up. I'm coming back and I want to see things a little bit different.” You have to do that, because as a parent you talk that way to your children and grandchildren. You've got to be involved. I don't think they allow our communities to be involved enough. I resent people coming in and trying to tell us how to live.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Josie.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Certainly, I believe there's a lot of hope in our aboriginal communities across the country and there's a lot of wisdom. I think we're building on those areas and certainly keeping families together. Can you imagine a mother losing her two or three children and being told that she's not a good parent?

To me, being a mother, I could never imagine that. But imagine what that would do. In this province, 64% of the children are aboriginal children, and in some places, such as Manitoba, I believe that as high as 80% of our aboriginal kids are in care. So, yes, we've eliminated the residential schools, but we see the legacy of that, which continues. Now we're going to see another legacy of our children who are in care.

If we take the time and invest in our families to keep them together, then we'll be a lot further in society, I bet you, 20 years down the road. So we need to work to keep the families together.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Ms. Grewal. Your time is up. Sorry. Maybe you'll get a chance later.

Madame Demers, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Bartkus, I found your answer to my colleague Ms. Neville very interesting and I would like to continue along the same lines.

In the places we have visited, when there is a lot of racism in the police forces, one of the problems is also likely a lack of people, a lack of education and a lack of training. You said that you need more people and more training; more police officers, in fact, not more prisons.

You also talked about initiatives for people in custody, from the time they are taken into custody to the time they are convicted. Could you expand on that a little? Are you talking about restorative justice or community initiatives? Could you expand on that a little? Can you offer us any suggestions that we could use to make people and the police—say in Williams Lake or Prince Albert—understand that they would be much further ahead working with communities than against them?

● (0920)

[*English*]

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: Yes, I probably have a different outlook on this situation because I've been involved in this sort of work for many years, on the child protection side and now in domestic violence. I believe we have to address the issues of vulnerable persons in our community. Violence is still considered a viable option in peoples' lives, and there has to be some sort of paradigm shift. There has to be some educational component that tells people to stop, that it's not appropriate.

As a policing organization we have become desensitized because of the volume of work that is out there, because of the level of violence that we see perpetuated against people day in, day out. We've grown accustomed. We've made allowances. We've had to set thresholds with respect to what we'll investigate and what we won't investigate. We'll investigate assault causing bodily harm, but we can't look after assaults. You know what? We'll do the aggravated assaults, but we won't do the assaults with a firearm.

This is the world I live in now. It has become so complex and so busy that we have to make certain allowances within the confines of our own organization because we don't have enough resources. Do we need more resources? I'm not sure. I think there has to be a bit of a paradigm shift in terms of what we believe is important to us as a community. If the focus is vulnerable persons and family violence, I think that may alleviate a lot of the issues that we see, that we're dealing with now in the long term. I maintain this fact, and I've maintained it my entire career as a police officer for 25 years: you spend 85% of your time going into people's homes. It's not responding to bank robberies and the calls that maybe police officers think they're going to answer when they're young and impressionable. When they get old and bald like me, they realize that it's really important to learn how to talk to people.

So I think we have to get back to basics. You win the hearts and minds of people through their trust.

Inspector Bill Spinks (Serious Crime Branch, Edmonton Police Service): I think one thing that really prevents us from being able to stop the cycle of violence is that there's a lack of education within the court system itself, and I say that with the utmost respect. We continuously arrest individuals and bring them before courts, and often what's relied upon in assessing whether or not a person should be released back into the community is their criminal record. But we know that some of the most dangerous and high-risk situations involve individuals who have no criminal record. We apply or attempt to apply science, in partnership with the University of Alberta psychology department, to form risk assessments and to provide these risk assessments to the courts before these individuals even get to trial. So our most dangerous time is when somebody is brought before the court to speak to bail. If the person is released, a whole number, a plethora, of negative events can happen.

So I believe we need, perhaps through the federal government, to start some legislation along the lines of encouraging the court systems to rely upon science rather than on old criminal records, which really are useless.

We were just working on a case yesterday in which an individual had no criminal record, but in which, in consultation with a doctor from the psychology department at the U of A, we were able to develop a risk assessment tool that we provided to the courts. That individual is still in jail, and we know that is probably going to save a woman's life.

● (0925)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Mr. Spinks.

Thank you, Ms. Demers.

Now we go to Ms. Crowder. You have five minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

I just want to touch on something Ms. Nepinak mentioned about the three levels of government and jurisdictional issues. Of course, we see this over and over again. Right now, in fact, some of us would argue that there is forced assimilation going on as people are forced to leave their home communities, their reserve communities, and are forced into large urban centres, where there is certainly inadequate funding from the federal government to deal with urban aboriginal peoples. Oftentimes the government will say that now that you're no longer on reserve, you're a provincial responsibility, and in some provinces you actually have become a municipal responsibility, because in some provinces social services have been downloaded to the municipal level.

Given that your recommendation is that the three levels of government find a way to work together, can you make any suggestions? It's a mess. We see it in all kinds of areas. We see it in health care. We see it in education. We see it in the criminal justice system. The federal government is very happy—and this is not a partisan comment, because this has been going on for decades and it's not new—to offload it to the provinces and tell them it's their problem.

Do you have any suggestions?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: I'm not sure what the final answer is on that. However, if we are to develop strategies and solutions towards the reduction of family violence in aboriginal communities, there is a need for the governments to come together. How they're going to do it—I'm sure they'll wrestle around that for quite some time yet. I think there needs to be more pressure, whether it comes from our elected officials or whoever should be involved, and there needs to be discussion. The first nations women, for example, who are coming into shelters in this province represent more than 60%.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Do you have any sense of how many of them are coming from reserve communities and coming to the city? Many reserves, of course, don't have safe houses, and they have no supports for women who are subject to domestic violence.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Right. According to our statistics at Awo Taan, up to 67% are coming from first nations communities into the shelter.

Ms. Jean Crowder: They're forced out of their community. They've got nowhere else to go, so they come to an urban centre where they're then subject to all kinds of other factors. Then they end up in the shelters.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: They end up in the shelters. Their homelessness, of course, is huge. Poverty is huge. Of course, with that comes some criminal activity; child welfare becomes involved; police are involved. There are many systems that become involved in that process. But if we are to develop those solutions, I'm not sure how to get the three levels of government to the table. I think it would be honourable for that to happen, but I think we can just keep putting on some pressure and talking and educating them about the issues as well.

Ms. Jean Crowder: One of the things that drives people is money, right? So we can often get governments to sit up and pay attention when we talk about how much it's going to cost. Do any of you have any sense of what it costs each level of government to deal with an individual? You can use just sort of a typical individual.

Staff Sargeant?

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: I believe it costs $1.2 million to investigate a homicide from start to finish. That was the last statistic I received. It's a lot less to do preventive work and get in front of these situations before they turn ugly. We spend a lot of money and allocate a lot of resources to investigating homicides, and not as much towards family violence. I think that's representative of most organizations nationally.

● (0930)

Ms. Jean Crowder: So we're dealing with the end of the problem.

Am I out of time?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): You've got one minute.

Ms. Jean Crowder: What we end up dealing with is the end of the problem. We end up dealing with the domestic violence.

Mr. Langford.

Mr. Donald Langford: We're big business, okay. It costs over $340 per day to maintain a high-needs kid in a group home.

Ms. Jean Crowder: What could that $340 per day do for the family, if they had a family?

Mr. Donald Langford: It could do an awful lot for the family, but nobody wants to talk about it. You're paying $100 a day to keep a child in foster care. I'm paying some of my foster parents $6,000 a month tax-free to look after four or five children. Just think, if we gave $2,000 to that family and provided some supervision and some guidance and support, how they could survive. We're putting the money in the wrong place. Unfortunately, in the justice system and child care system, we're big business.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Mr. Langford.

You're out of time, Ms. Crowder.

Thank you very much to you all for attending. We're really running short on time. I did have a question, but I think I'll go over and ask you after this. Thank you.

We're suspended.

● (0930)

(Pause)

● (0935)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this is a study of violence against aboriginal women. Today we have, as an individual, Jo-Anne Fiske; from Memorial March for Missing and Murdered Women Calgary, Suzanne Dzus; from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Mike Sekela; and from Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk and Movement, April Eve P. Wiberg and Gloria Neapetung.

Each of you will have seven minutes. When you have two minutes remaining, I will hold up my hand and wave, so please look up every once in a while. And if I'm going like this, then you're really close, so wrap it up very quickly. Thank you.

We will start with Ms. Fiske.

Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske (Professor of Women's Studies, University of Lethbridge, As an Individual): Good morning, and thank you, Madam Chairman.

I'm very pleased to have been invited to have this opportunity to meet with you. It's an honour to be sitting here with the aboriginal women who are representing their communities.

I want to address specifically the violence in urban areas, and I want to do so based on three of my experiences, which I think bring me as a qualified speaker.

First, I have been a university professor now for some 30 years, working exclusively on issues dealing with aboriginal women across Canada. I'm both an anthropologist and a professor of women's studies currently at the University of Lethbridge.

Second, for a long time I have been a member of aboriginal communities as an anthropologist and through extended kinship networks. I seasonally live on the Highway of Tears in northern British Columbia and have lost people who are very dear to me, and I have suffered the pain of seeing young children violated by members of urban communities because they know these children are vulnerable and they can count on people not caring.

Third, I believe I can speak to this issue with a great deal of knowledge because I have just recently completed studies in urban areas specifically dealing with the reception of first nations women as they leave reserves and move into urban areas. Over the past 10 years, I have witnessed this transition and the responses of urban communities when aboriginal women, and most specifically first nations women from reserves, move into their neighbourhood.

When I look at the violence, I am concerned about the violence that is not perpetrated within the family. You heard very eloquently this morning about family violence. I'm concerned and wish to speak to you today about the violence that aboriginal women and young girls experience at the hands of outsiders to their community. The downtown east side, where I resided once, is perhaps the most infamous example of what happens to the most vulnerable when they move to the cities.

There are a number of reasons why urban aboriginal women are so vulnerable. We have to remember that 72% of aboriginal women are urban residents. In fact, the urban areas have higher rates of violence against women than in other communities.

The most compelling reasons that I think we need to deal with in order to understand the violence in urban areas are, first of all, prevailing attitudes, failure of authorities, and the wide public indifference to aboriginal women. We need to do nothing more than look in this room at the empty space for the media to realize that that indifference is writ large.

It's absence, total absence of media, and I know that's not been the only experience you've had where the media have not paid attention. And it's impoverishment.

To begin with the issues of public authorities, we heard this morning about the very difficult and painful job of policing where there are high levels of interpersonal violence, and we know that this can, in fact, desensitize, as was expressed by the representative of the Edmonton police. But that desensitization is only part of the problem. In research on all levels of official interaction with communities—whether it's health, education, the correctional system, the courts, etc.—we find that aboriginal women are discredited. Our research shows over and over again that they are not seen as valued citizens. This attitude is picked up and expressed over and over again in media.

When women go missing on Highway 16, if it's a young, blonde woman...as was the case in my home community, where one of my neighbours lost a child just recently, and that child's picture was on the first or second page in every paper in the nation for days. At the same time, one of my extended family members was found dead, and the only comment in the paper was that she was found dead where prostitutes were known to be. Well, thank you just the same, but it's also where I walk my dog and play with my granddaughter and have other family activities. The fact that it was a public park was never mentioned. Her name was not mentioned—a grievous problem with media, public education, and the authorities that so identified her. Her name has not been in the papers again. Interestingly enough, she was related to a young child who was savagely beaten by a former judge of Prince George who'd had a reign of terror over aboriginal women and their girls for years before he was brought to justice.

Finally, I want to talk about impoverishment. I want to talk about impoverishment on three levels. First, and most significantly, is the impoverishment of Canada consequent upon the colonialism, the biases, the outrageous discrimination. There's an impoverishment of imagination. There's an impoverishment of understanding citizenship. There's an impoverishment of recognizing what aboriginal women have contributed and can continue to contribute to our country. And there's an impoverishment of empathy for the vulnerable.

There is a money impoverishment that makes their transitions to cities so difficult, when it is so necessary. I'll give you one example. In the city in which I'm doing research about a transition home, women attempted to set up a transition home to bring women in to upper education programs and children's education programs from a nearby reserve. They have literally been harassed and run out of the community, and the mayor of that city recently said, “We must take back our communities and parks.” It's attitude. We need education programs across the nation, very broadly, and we need government action that takes responsibility for directing the citizens at large.

Thank you.

● (0940)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thanks Jo-Anne.

Now we have Suzanne from Memorial March for Missing and Murdered Women in Calgary. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Suzanne Dzus (Founder and Chairperson, Memorial March for Missing and Murdered Women Calgary): *Tansi* .

I am a Cree and Mohawk woman from the Michel First Nation. My colonial name is Suzanne Dzus, and I am the founder of the Memorial March for Missing and Murdered Women in Calgary. I'm also a program coordinator and a facilitator within the Treaty 7 region.

We are an organization whose objectives include raising the awareness of peoples across Turtle Island in addition to honouring those women who have been taken long before their time. This morning I asked the Creator and my grandmothers to join us today that I may speak what needs to be said, but also that they aid this committee in hearing what must be done in order to incite true change.

Much of what I know has been given to me through stories shared by families and other women, as well as through my own experience. The stories have many similar elements: the lack of education, the lack of appropriate and accessible services, racism, normalization of violence, sexual assaults, and the acceptability of sexual assault. There are levels, and it has become unmitigatingly devastating for most young women.

The apprehension of our children that began with the sixties scoop still continues today. There's the marginalization, and there is the continuous and bombarding media that not only objectifies our women but sexualizes them at an extremely early age. All of these pieces are and have been controlled by Canada's nation state.

What I bring you here today is nothing that you don't already know and have not been told by many people long before me. Cases in point are the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1966 and the Amnesty International report *Stolen Sisters* in 2004. They speak volumes to the root causes of violence against aboriginal women.

There's the continuation of supported racism and sexism our women experience daily at the hands of society and government agencies, such as the RCMP. When the organization charged with protecting us displays a blatant disregard for our safety and well-being, how can the resulting ripple effect in our society be anything but detrimental to our aboriginal women?

I do not believe this committee requires any more information. It is required to take action and no longer contribute to the continued victimization of aboriginal women. What I ask of you today is the commitment to incite true change. If band-aid solutions are all this research is willing to propose, then we're wasting our time and precious energy.

The first point of action is that all policing organizations be held accountable for their handling of investigations into the disappearance and murder of all aboriginal women. Saying “Sorry, we handled that poorly” is no longer acceptable. The apologies that went with the Pickton case were an aberration. The fact that he was allowed to continue for as many years as he did speaks volumes to the lack of respect and the lack of.... I've lost the word, but it speaks to the willingness of our policing systems to look at aboriginals and portray aboriginal women as second-rate citizens. That ripple effect is felt throughout our communities all across this country. This is not a new piece, and if you speak to aboriginal women on the streets, they know it and will share it with you. They don't go to the police because they'll get it worse there. I've heard that from them. They will not go. It's easier to handle what's going on themselves than to phone and be disregarded again.

On the second point of action, perpetrators must be held accountable for the violence against women and the parameters and description of violence to truly reflect the abuse women experience. Violence against women is not simply the hitting, slapping, punching, biting, shooting, beating, and raping. It's also about the words and descriptions we use for those women. It's our disregard for their human lives. That has to be addressed.

Finally, services must reflect the true needs of aboriginal women in Canada, both urban and rural. I ask today that you move forward and incite true change.

Hai, hai.

● (0945)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Suzanne.

The RCMP is next.

You have a lot of decorations. Do you have a rank?

Chief Superintendent Mike Sekela (Criminal Operations Officer, "D" Division, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Yes, I do. I'm Chief Superintendent Mike Sekela. I am presently the criminal operations officer in Manitoba, but I believe I was invited because I am one of the co-founders and the team commander of Project KARE, as well as the team commander of the High Risk Missing Persons Project that was created in 2002. I also participate in the coordinating committee of senior officials for the missing and murdered women working group and with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police working group for the national missing persons program.

I've submitted a document to this committee that goes into great detail. However, in watching the committee involvement in Manitoba, I quickly realized that I wouldn't have enough time. I'll give a shorter version. The document is available in both official languages.

I'll explain what Project KARE is. It is a Royal Canadian Mounted Police-led initiative derived from a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional joint forces operation called the High Risk Missing Persons Project. Project KARE has the Edmonton Police Service as a full-time partner, while enjoying secondments from most other police agencies in Alberta.

Project KARE is the third phase of the High Risk Missing Persons Project. It was formed not only as a result of work completed in the preceding two phases, but as a proactive response to the climate that existed in Canada following several high-profile serial offender cases, such as those of Robert Pickton and Paul Bernardo.

Project KARE has four objectives. Interestingly enough, its first objective, which serves as a continued improvement to the community, is to formulate and implement strategies that would minimize the lethal risk to the high-risk individuals.

The second objective, which is also a service to the community, is to investigate, identify, and apprehend the person or persons responsible for the murders of high-risk individuals, consisting predominantly of sex trade workers located primarily in Edmonton.

The third objective, which serves to enhance communications within and cooperation among agencies, is to establish an integrated Alberta-based homicide unit that has the capacity to investigate high-risk missing persons, unsolved homicides, and serial offenders.

The fourth objective that was created relates directly to the development of creative and innovative approaches that promote quality and excellence in law enforcement and a template of best practices for other projects, locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally. Presentations on the Project KARE model and its operations have been provided to all major police agencies in Alberta and to many other non-police groups from across Canada and elsewhere.

The purpose of the High Risk Missing Persons Project was to identify, collect, collate, evaluate, and analyze high-risk missing persons and unsolved homicide cases in Alberta, and it was expanded to the region to determine if there were any potentially linked cases. It was divided into three phases.

Phase one was the collection and collation. Phase two was the analysis of the results to determine whether one or more serial offenders existed. This involved ViCLAS—the violent crime linkage analysis system—as well as conducting duplicate analyses on cases to determine the presence of any linkages.

A significant number of findings were documented, ranging from the acknowledgement that cases were positively linked, potentially linked, containing other entities or matches. As a result of phases one and two, there was a need for an investigational phase, which is phase three, or Project KARE.

Several creative and innovative approaches or best practices promoting quality and excellence in law enforcement in other areas have been created or used by Project KARE. Several existing partnerships with non-government agencies, police agencies, government agencies, aboriginal groups and persons, academic institutions, stakeholders, and clients were enhanced, while many more developed, in partnerships with agencies such as the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, with Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne, and the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton, with Ms. Kate Quinn and Ms. Kathy King. There was also a collaborative research project by Dr. Sandra Lambertus, “Project Lifeline: Addressing Violence Perpetrated Against Aboriginal Women in Alberta”.

These are just a few examples that Project KARE participated in. There are other innovative examples, such as the Pro Active team, which relates to goal number one: minimizing the risk of having more high-risk persons murdered.

● (0950)

There's an elaborate social agency fan-out system. There are victims' services, a family liaison plan, and a missing person unidentified human remains website. I also have two separate international best practice workshops. Improvements through the Alberta missing persons and unidentified human remains site and the Pro Active team are the ones that most relate to these hearings today. I believe we set a standard through enhanced communications within and among agencies.

In conclusion, I believe Project KARE is an excellent example of how services to the community have been continuously improved upon and continue to be improved upon when we are dealing with these very important issues.

Thank you again for the ability to speak to you today. I'll answer any questions you have as well as I can.

● (0955)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Mike.

We will now go to Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk and Movement. You have seven minutes.

Ms. April Wiberg (Founder, Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk and Movement): Thank you.

Hello, everyone. My name is April Eve. My traditional name is Medicine Spear Dancer. I'm from the Mikisew Cree First Nation, which is about 1,000 kilometres north of Edmonton. I'm the mother of a beautiful nine-month-old baby girl. I'm also the founder of the Edmonton Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk.

I'll give you a bit of background. In 2007 a small group of concerned citizens emerged in response to the hundreds and hundreds of missing and murdered indigenous aboriginal women across Canada. We started a grassroots movement, and from that an annual walk was created, the Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk. We are not funded by government or business. We are strictly a grassroots community-based volunteer group of everyday people. Many of us, including myself, have family members who have been taken, who are missing, or who have been murdered.

Many of us have a common life experience that consists of various forms of abuse, exploitation, etc., but we are not victims. We are survivors. We recognize that all cases of missing and murdered women are important. But the fact is, in Canada, in our communities, there are predators among us who are preying specifically on our women and children.

The statistics speak for themselves. These are some of the current research findings by the Native Women's Association of Canada. Some of you are already aware, I'm sure, of these findings, but it's important to recognize the harsh reality of targeted violence against aboriginal women and children. Aboriginal women, aged 25 to 44, are five times more likely to die of violence than are other Canadian women of the same age group. We experience violence by both aboriginal and non-aboriginal offenders. Our women also report experiencing more severe and potentially life-threatening forms of family violence than do non-aboriginal women, such as being choked, beaten, having a gun or a knife used against them, or being sexually assaulted. Aboriginal women and girls are also at an increased risk for homelessness. We are more likely to be killed by a stranger than are non-aboriginal women and girls. The majority of reported cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women involve young women and girls. Many are mothers. Most occur in urban areas, and nearly half the cases remain unsolved. In our group, we believe there's a strong link between domestic human trafficking and the cases of these missing and murdered women and children.

The Native Women's Association of Canada's mission is to help empower women. They identify that changes are needed to increase safety and lessen vulnerability of aboriginal women and girls. They believe that the violence against women ends with restoring a sacred position of aboriginal women as teachers, healers, and givers of life, and we couldn't agree more. With the Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk, we are trying to do our part to help raise awareness and to give a voice to those women and children whose lives have been taken, to those who are being sexually exploited, and to those who are still missing. In my own way, I am trying to help break the cycle of family violence, racism, and addiction.

We have been saying for the last few years that we would like to be more proactive with these causes and unite other organizations and people doing similar initiatives, so I'm honoured to share this with you today, on behalf of the Aboriginal Women's Professional Association, the City of Edmonton and the City of Edmonton's naming committee, the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton, the Memorial March for all the Missing and Murdered Women of Edmonton, the Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk, the Boyle Street Community League, the Edmonton Community Foundation, Edmonton city councillors Karen Leibovici, Ben Henderson, Linda Sloan, Kim Krushell, Mayor of Edmonton Stephen Mandel, and last but not least, the Honourable Rona Ambrose, Minister for the Status of Women.

We have all worked together and created our own committee to give a downtown avenue in Edmonton an honourary name to honour all missing and murdered women. The name chosen by the group is O Kisikow Way, *o kisikow* meaning “angel” in Cree. Syllabics for the Cree word *o kisikow* will be used in addition to the name to honour the past and present usage of the Cree language. The City of Edmonton's naming committee also supported the request to place a plaque along with the signage to educate and enhance the awareness of O Kisikow (Angel) Way.

The signage and christening for O Kisikow Way will be unveiled in May of 2011. This is in response to the request sent out from the City of Iqaluit, Nunavut, which was the first Canadian city to name a street Angel Street. Iqaluit is encouraging all capital cities in Canada to have a street named Angel Street to honour all the women who have been victims of violence. We are proud to say that Edmonton is now the second.

Thank you for the opportunity to be with all of you here today. We are hoping the federal government will do more research into the possible links between domestic human trafficking in these cases of missing and murdered women and children. We would also like to see a public service announcement that would be televised possibly across the nation to show and identify to the general public the dangers out there experienced by aboriginal women and girls.

Thank you.

● (1000)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, April. Well done.

Now we will have a seven-minute round. Try to keep your answers condensed. I will stop you if you go over.

First we have Anita from the Liberal Party. She will be asking you questions.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

And thank you all for coming.

We've been on the road at hearings, and we think we've heard it all or that we have the story, and we come to one more meeting and we learn more and there are different perspectives. So I thank you very much for coming and sharing with us.

My second question, which I'll come to after, is a question about the Native Women's Association and Sisters in Spirit. That will be my second question.

And I don't mean to pick on you, sir, but I am going to focus on the police, because it has been very much a recurring theme in what we've heard as we've travelled, and we heard it today, right now. It is the fear of many young and not-so-young aboriginal women to go to the police. As I said at the previous panel, I was in one community of probably 30,000, where the women gathered there said to me they don't bother anymore. They don't feel that there's any protection from the police. They don't feel protected.

So you're here and you've got a project and you've got a model on the missing women, and we've all been calling for an inquiry into the missing and murdered aboriginal women, but my real issue is this. What's going on in the RCMP, from your perspective, that women are afraid to come forward and report what they're experiencing? It's not confined to one community; it's almost like a disease.

C/Supt Mike Sekela: In Project KARE we have the Pro Active team. I explained the first goal and objective, which is to minimize the risk of having further high-risk persons murdered, and that includes aboriginal women, but all high-risk persons.

We have a 90% compliance rate of registering with Project KARE, so that means there are over 900 high-risk persons who are voluntarily giving their information, coming to police, and interacting through places like PACE, the John Howard Society, Crossroads, and actually contacting us. That is why this project is a unique opportunity in the investigational world of policing, to build that trust. It's a trust issue, in my mind, and by being out there with the Pro Active team in its non-enforcement component of Project KARE, which is very interesting as well, we go out and talk to the high-risk persons, gather all their information, and they are part of the project.

● (1005)

Hon. Anita Neville: I appreciate that, and that's Edmonton. We've been in communities. We were in Williams Lake a day or two ago and heard horror stories in terms of police response or non-response. We've heard it everywhere we've been, that women are afraid to go to the police.

What you are doing is good and it's proactive, but it's not being replicated across western Canada. Do we replicate KARE? What do we do to create an environment wherein women know that the police are there to support them, not to degrade them, not to minimize them, not to belittle their experience or belittle them as individuals? What do we do, or what do you do?

C/Supt Mike Sekela: What I'm commenting on is what we're doing and what we can build upon, something like KARE. I am not saying replicate Project KARE across this country, but something of that nature, where the trust is being built with aboriginal women, with all persons, regardless of their ethnicity.

In this big country of ours, in the different policing agencies, each one should have a similar type of solution where they can build upon what they're doing to build the trust. You have to build that trust. You have to be able to show what you're doing and treat everyone with respect and dignity, regardless, again, of whether they are aboriginal women, Caucasian, or whatever, and education is a start, educating both police and the public as well.

Hon. Anita Neville: You have a senior position.

C/Supt Mike Sekela: Yes, I do.

Hon. Anita Neville: What kinds of initiatives, direction, activity do you take to get the message out—you're in Manitoba, and I know Manitoba well—to a rural detachment in Manitoba with a high aboriginal population to create an environment where the women will come forward? I can name any one of a number of communities there.

C/Supt Mike Sekela: In Manitoba we actually sit with all of what we call junior officers. We call it a fireside chat. We embark upon our message, the commanding officer and myself, as a criminal operations officer, that everyone needs to be treated with dignity and respect. I actually go out and work with them in the police car, talking with them one on one as well as addressing them at every opportunity, every training opportunity, every education opportunity, to get the message out that everyone needs to be treated with respect and dignity.

Hon. Anita Neville: Are you having an impact?

C/Supt Mike Sekela: I have to say yes. I have to go back to my days here in Alberta with Project KARE. Yes, we are. When we have a 90% compliance rate, with 60% being aboriginal, I am comfortable saying we are doing something and making an impact. Is it enough? I don't know. We have to keep continuing; we have to keep striving to be better.

Hon. Anita Neville: All right. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Okay. Now we go to Madame Demers.

Ms. Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses for being with us this morning.

Mr. Sekela, unfortunately, I have to get on your case as well. It looks like you are the only one in the group who thinks that things are going well. You are confident about the work you are doing, but Ms. Dzus, Ms. Wiberg and Ms. Fiske are telling us something very different.

In the 82 cases you studied, have there been any convictions? Have the proactive teams of investigators prevented any aboriginal women from going missing or being killed? Have they found those responsible in the cases of the women who have gone missing? Have the tools you have developed produced results any quicker? Ms. Fiske told us about an aboriginal woman who was found dead. Have your tools been able to find that woman's killer any faster?

● (1010)

[*English*]

C/Supt Mike Sekela: I can say yes, we have had success in our second goal and objective, which was to implement strategies to capture the person or persons responsible.

Thomas Svekla was convicted of murder and is now declared a dangerous offender. Another Project KARE-mandated case, involving Mr. Joseph Laboucan, who murdered a young lady, Nina Courtepatte, is presently before the courts. There is another charge in relation to homicide, so I can't speak in great detail in relation to that. But, yes, we have success in the second goal within Project KARE.

Back to the first goal, I can tell you that in June I asked the same question: are we making an impact? Is the Pro Active team actually doing something other than having a 90% compliance rate. The numbers gathered then indicated there were 43 registered high-risk persons located after having been reported missing to Project KARE. There were 39 individuals with mental health issues on the street who we have assisted to get off the street, and we have 54 individuals recorded as having left the street for a permanent extended time.

Again, we don't do this in isolation. This is multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency, and integrated. What we do with the 900-plus registered and the program.... The Project KARE Pro Active program has expanded to places like Red Deer, Fort McMurray, and Grande Prairie. Other agencies from out east have come out as well.... I'd have to go through this material. I know they have. I'm thinking it's the Peel Regional Police, from my memory. Toronto has a similar program now.

Is there more we can do? I'm not going to sit here and say no. There is always more we can do. If we stop striving, there is no sense being here, but this is the measurable impact we have had.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you.

Ms. Dzus, can you confirm what Mr. Sekela is saying?

[*English*]

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: No.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: No? You have not seen any impact on the street?

[*English*]

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: In the Calgary area, I can't say that we're actually seeing the impact of Project KARE. The number of women I have been in contact with, who are willing to approach police, has not increased in any way, shape or form.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Is the project running in Calgary as well?

[*English*]

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: No, it's not.

C/Supt Mike Sekela: The Calgary Police Service has come up recently, in my understanding. Again, you will appreciate that I have been gone for 9 months...14 months to the Olympics, and now in Manitoba. However, I checked with them. The Calgary Police Service is interested and has come up, and they have observed how we do this Pro Active registry. Have they started yet? I can't comment on that.

● (1015)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Ms. Dzus, you have told us that the time has come for action and I believe you. That is true. Exactly what kind of action do you want?

[*English*]

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: When I look at what needs to occur within the Treaty 7 area or within the province of Alberta for us to see a difference, and the fact that we have a huge number of women who choose not to engage with the police at all...there needs to be trust built and it has to come from the top; it has to. I don't know how else to put it without saying that it needs to be mandated.

When I talk to aboriginal women and people who are employed by the Calgary city police, I hear consistently that there is a huge piece of racism involved within that organization that goes to the top of that organization. There are people who are employed by them who say that if they raise a stink, they are told very clearly that they will be at the bottom of the ladder very, very soon. They have to choose whether they're going to stay employed or move forward with filing any kind of complaint against superiors about racist actions within the police force. When I see that, I know that has to change for us.

One of the other things we look at.... I talk to women and their families, and I see the impoverishment, as Jo-Anne mentioned. We have a huge number of aboriginal women living in urban centres who have no idea how to access services. There may be services there, but they're not accessible for them. If they don't know they're there, then they're absolutely useless, and that is huge. So the services need to be appropriate.

We're looking at healing these women. Between the residential schools and the sixties scoop, which was the apprehension of children, which removed children permanently from their homes... again, I look at the destruction of family circuits. You're destroying the family units. Without support, those families can never grow. They can never become whole and healthy again.

I look at the family from which I came, and it is so fractured. It is so fractured. I have eight aunts. Every one of my aunts was raped, more than once, and it was okay because it happens to everybody. Really? Does it need to? When we talk about those kinds of acceptable numbers.... My daughter is 15, and if I have my way she will never be raped, ever, because it's not acceptable, and that's what I'm asking from you, that those pieces of violence are no longer acceptable.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you.

Next is Ms. Grewal. You have seven minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

After sitting here...I don't know where to start and where to end. I'm listening to your stories and I feel the pain. No human being should be living in fear. Violence against aboriginal women is a very serious issue, and I think serious attention needs to be given to this issue.

Let me reassure you that our government considers ending violence against aboriginal women a top priority. We're dealing with an issue, however, that's a shared responsibility among all levels of government, whether it's the police, whether it's the justice system, whether it's aboriginal peoples, or whether it's civil society as a whole.

Our committee has previously heard about the need to address this issue of jurisdiction and whose responsibility it is to provide services. I think it is important that the federal government articulate a vision for all Canadians and that it establish guiding principles that will aid all players in dealing with this very terrible problem.

I have a question for each one of you: what suggestions can you offer for helping government deal with violence against aboriginal women?

Let's start with Jo-Anne.

● (1020)

Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske: Thank you.

I think this is really important, and I want to speak to the position of the police as an example. I want to remind the committee that they are not the only example, but they are here today, and we tend to emphasize who is amongst us.

To my mind, no matter how hard Mike works to address the issues throughout the ranks of the RCMP, he is not going to be successful if in fact the character and behaviour that he is asking of his members is so contrary to the public behaviour and the socialization in which those members must work. When they end up in the small communities in northern British Columbia, they are going to be lonely if they cannot socialize with the dominant community around them. And when the dominant community around them is downright racist, discriminatory, and contemptible of aboriginal women, it is extremely hard for those individuals, who are posted there for only short periods of time, to walk a line between those communities.

So what can the government do? I think first of all the government has to have a very strong education campaign on the human rights of aboriginal women. It needs to carry forth a very strong campaign such as the excellent example we just heard of, the streets of angels, but a campaign that goes beyond that to address the serious problems of bias and prejudice and vulnerability, recognizing that aboriginal women are citizens who contribute and who deserve the full protection of all levels of government.

I would not be so despairing if my research showed only the police as carrying this dilemma, but it is every level of government. Every little piece of work I do in education—gambling research, health research, etc.—shows that the same problems run right through. Aboriginal women are discredited at every level: their citizenship is denied. Public education programs are needed.

I think government members need to speak out every time we see the media carrying the lurid conversations it does about sex trade workers. This immediacy of listing mothers, grandmothers, aunties, and daughters as sex trade workers or people at risk—it's got to stop. The minute that taint comes out, there's a huge public reaction that these women got killed because they deserved to be.

You can be on Highway 16, our Highway of Tears, very briefly, and it's palpable. As I say, my neighbours lost their child very recently, a blond Caucasian child. No word of question about the dignity and integrity of that family showed up anywhere in the press. The people who were investigating two missing aboriginal women, one who was found murdered within 24 hours of the young girl, were called off the other cases even though the arrest for the first young girl was made simultaneously to finding her body. The other two women's cases were dropped.

We need a government with a strong, consistent, absolutely repeated message at every level of every service, because it's not just the police the women are afraid of. They are afraid of the hospitals because they're afraid the hospitals will report them to the police; they're afraid of the social service workers; they're afraid of going to get a driver's licence because they're afraid something might be on their record that will take them back to the police. They live in fear because there is an intertangled domination of discrimination.

● (1025)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): You have a minute.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: That's fine.

Suzanne.

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: I believe that Jo-Anne speaks very well and covers many pieces.

When I look at all of these pieces, I've heard stories of women who will not go into a homeless shelter because they're no longer safe. So when I listen to that, I need to know the same thing she does from the start, from the top; the message has to be clear all the way.

It's the same for me as a parent in my family, that there will be no swearing in our household. As a parent, I not only need to be a role model for that but also to enforce it. And I'm looking at the Canadian government and saying, you need to be a role model on this, so that this racism and sexism and the marginalization of aboriginal women will no longer continue. You need to be a role model for it and enforce it all the way down the line, right from you down to me—and that's it, that's how it's going to work.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you.

Now we go to the NDP and Ms. Crowder.

You have seven minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank you all for coming.

I'm actually going to continue along Ms. Grewal's line of questioning.

I just have a quick comment first. I think most of us can talk about the endemic discrimination that is present throughout institutions—schools, hospitals, the justice system, and the social services system—and I think all of us can tell pretty terrible stories we've heard from friends, family, and loved ones about how they've been treated when they have dealt with the system.

Ms. Fiske, you started outlining some of what you see as important. It seems to me, pretty clearly, that government leadership is absolutely critical at all levels of government.

Ms. Wiberg didn't get an opportunity to respond to that.

I guess what I'm really saying is that we all acknowledge there are significant resources and support and cultural awareness that need to go toward first nations, Métis, and Inuit. I think that's agreed. It seems to me, though, that until we start dealing with the non-aboriginal community, it will be very difficult for the healing to happen, because you're still going to bump up against those institutions every day, no matter how healthy your community becomes—and people will gather strength by pushing back.

But if you were going to tell the committee the one or two things you thought were needed to deal with the non-aboriginal community, what would they be?

Ms. April Wiberg: Thank you.

I grew up in rural Saskatchewan, and my sister and I were the only aboriginal kids in the whole school. I think—and my sister could agree—there was a lot of racism, not just by the children at the school but the teachers. I think if there were more education from the beginning of a child's education, with more focus on aboriginal awareness, that would be a great start.

I also know that various organizations in Edmonton have talked about something like a pilot project for aboriginal victims' services. Because so many of our people are living in urban areas, I think if we had aboriginal victims' services, just to start, in each major city in Canada, it would help bridge the gap between the aboriginal community and the police services.

But when you talk about all levels of government, I think quite often we leave out our own first nations governments, and they, too, should be held accountable; the responsibility should not just be left to non-aboriginal organizations. It really has to start in the home, it has to start in the schools, and it has to start in our communities.

Thank you.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Ms. Dzus, before I ask you a question, I want you to continue on that from your perspective. You've already outlined some things that need to happen in terms of raising awareness. I have one brief comment. I just want to remind people that it's not all high-risk people who disappear. Part of the response from the police force has been that when an aboriginal woman disappears, she obviously is high risk. And I've had families in my office crying because their university-attending young mother has been murdered or gone missing and yet the police response was, don't worry, she's just off doing whatever it is that women do on the street. I just wanted to put that on the record.

But the thing I wanted to ask you is whether there is a zero-tolerance policy in the RCMP with regard to racism and discriminatory practices. And I mean zero tolerance.

● (1030)

C/Supt Mike Sekela: Absolutely. If there is any incidence of that nature, it is immediately and swiftly dealt with. We do have processes in place, as do all other government institutions and organizations, but again, it's not tolerated.

I'd like to go back to your first comment, if you don't mind. The definition of high risk we use involves anyone—not just aboriginal women but anyone—whose behaviour, lifestyle, or circumstances place them at high or extreme risk of being a victim of violent crime. So that's critical, and that covers off your concern in relation to the university student. An example l can give is the file of a young lady who went missing in 1982 or 1983, I believe. She was a young girl, Caucasian, coming from school. Her lifestyle didn't put her at high risk, as would, say, a sex-trade worker's lifestyle, but the behaviour did in the sense that she was walking down a highway and she disappeared. It was the circumstances and what was left behind for police to review.

All of those things are taken into consideration. I just wanted to make sure...it's not a minimizing definition and it's not.... I know language is so important in these things, so I just wanted to make sure I cleared that up. It's regardless of gender or ethnicity. It's the circumstances, behaviour, and lifestyle all combined.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Ms. Dzus, do you have anything else to add regarding the issue of the lack of awareness and racism in the non-aboriginal community?

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: I believe that if we do not engage our men at a very personal level, we are never going to get rid of this issue. Every one of those men has a mother, and if you can make these women personable, if you can bring them back to humanity in their minds, we will have this issue dealt with in no time, really.

Ms. Jean Crowder: When you say “engage men”, what would you specifically like to see happen?

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: Let's start in school. Let's start in elementary school and let's start with teaching our boys about how to respect women, all women, without giving them a race. Teach them that all women are important and that they are to be respected. If we can teach them at a young age, right from the get-go, about respecting women, we have a better chance. But if we don't engage the men, we're hooped. I can stand up against violence as long as I want.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Suzanne.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Okay. Now we go for a round of five minutes, and with this one, try to keep your answers kind of short, please.

We go to Ms. Neville first.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just sitting here trying to think which question to go with, because there are so many.

On the missing and murdered aboriginal women, Ms. Fiske, you talked about living on the Highway of Tears. I was up in Prince George last year. I've travelled very substantially, and I have worked with the women in Manitoba a fair bit. Two or three of you are involved in marches for the women.

What we haven't talked about very much is the impact on their families. When I was in Prince George I met with the Highway of Tears governing council, and there were some family members there who were profoundly eloquent in expressing their sorrow, the impact on them, and their messages to me.

What would your message be to the families who were left behind by the murdered and/or missing aboriginal women?

● (1035)

Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske: I think that first and foremost we have to look at Sisters in Spirit. We have to see what the Native Women's Association accomplished, and the walks for justice. I think all these aboriginal women's organizations need very strong funding for both research and advocacy—and I know the Native Women's Association of Canada lost their funding for that—because the families need to be able to heal, they need to be able to work with people they can trust, and they need somebody who can bridge that very weak relationship with all levels of authority.

The first thing I would do is get that funding into the hands of those community workers and back into the hands of the Native Women's Association of Canada—which has an international reputation for its accomplishments on that campaign—so that the families can feel and know that there are people there who are acting as advocates on their behalf. If they don't have that bridge, they are really cast aside. They can see little steps being taken, but those little steps disintegrate. They don't have a holistic aboriginal approach with women they can trust.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Suzanne, April, and Gloria, would you comment?

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: I'd like to add that I agree with Jo-Anne in her presentation of that information. I also think that it should be added to so that appropriate services in healing could be offered at the levels of the families. April mentioned looking at an aboriginal victim's services; they would be able to have support from the moment they've lost their loved one until the point that they're able to completely finish their grieving. There's so much that needs to be spoken to in terms of how that's being handled and in having someone there who is able to walk with them through that process and help them access support and services to help them through that process as well.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

April and Gloria and Mike, I don't mean to be rude and pass over you. If there is time and you have a comment, I'd appreciate it.

Ms. April Wiberg: I'll share a really quick story.

We've been doing our walk since 2007. We're not funded. We do it all ourselves. That's what makes it a beautiful thing. But a couple of years ago it was becoming very stressful trying to juggle family life and work and trying to organize this walk. We almost gave up. We almost said we couldn't do it because it was just too much. There were a lot of heavy things involved. People have loved ones who are still missing, and daughters murdered.

Anyway, one of our volunteers who's volunteered with us since 2007 shared with me that up until we started doing our walks in the community, she didn't feel that she had the trust to take part in something like this. When she heard that we were grassroots, she decided to volunteer. She actually hadn't dealt with the murder of her mother since her mother died when she was 10 years old. This gave her a chance to start her healing process, and she's in her forties. She's been to the federal women's institution; she's been through hell and back. The fact that we somehow played a part to help her in her healing process speaks volumes to how we try to help the community with their healing.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, April.

Okay. Now I get to ask a question.

Suzanne, you had a phrase there that I want to go back to. You said, “the acceptability of abuse”. Now, that really disturbs me. How can we get these women away and build their self-esteem? How can we get the police to stop treating them like second-class citizens?

● (1040)

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: It's a huge order. When I look at these pieces, a slap, a punch, and a hit is acceptable.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): No, it's not.

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: I understand it's not. I know it's not, but when you live in that and when you approach the police, and they say, “Well, you know, it's just....” That type of attitude helps to harvest even more of that. It gets to escalate. So if we can move toward zero tolerance, a true zero tolerance policy, because abuse is not just simply about the physical violence.... We know many, many women who have been beaten to where there is no spirit whatsoever left, and never have they been struck.

When we look at the physical abuse...we talk about domestic violence. When a man can threaten and insinuate, “Just go ahead, try and leave, I dare you”, and nothing is done, that perpetuates more of that cycle. It perpetuates an escalation of that cycle. If our women can have faith and go to the police and say, “This is what he said”, and there is a consequence to that action, that perpetrator feels a consequence to that action, that will help to eliminate that cycle. I know it's not the only thing, but that is a piece that we can work towards.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Mike, you heard her say that you, as the police, have to be a little more sensitive. When there is verbal abuse, how can you separate the two? There's no law on the books for just saying, “I'm going to kill you”.

C/Supt Mike Sekela: Well, there are laws on the books for uttering threats of death or bodily harm.

When Suzanne says “the police”...I can't speak for all the police, but I'll speak on behalf of our police agency in relation to our policy. There is zero tolerance with domestic violence.

The definition provided by Suzanne would be a difficult one, from just listening, with no other circumstances surrounding it, but again, if someone—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): So if she's not beaten and—

C/Supt Mike Sekela: No, no, it depends on what the words are. If the words are uttering threats, which falls under our law or legislation, the Criminal Code of Canada, we can act. That doesn't mean we cannot still intervene in relation to guiding these troubled relationships to other social agencies, speaking with the victim of the verbal abuse and pointing them in the right direction.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): But do you do it?

C/Supt Mike Sekela: Yes. Does it occur on every occasion? The word “police” is like saying the word “government”. You have to be more specific. Are you referring to the RCMP?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Well, I would say whoever is involved, whatever police force is involved in this.

C/Supt Mike Sekela: I don't know. I don't know what incident. I don't know who.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Well, no. I'm sure she was just doing a general thing.

But I think police should take a sensitivity course on aboriginal women and be a little more sensitive. There are differences between whites and aboriginals. They have a lot of history behind them, a lot of traditional things that have to be addressed. We cannot just let them go and fall between the cracks. They have to be at the forefront and we have to start addressing that.

C/Supt Mike Sekela: Yes, understood. We do—

● (1045)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): I'm sorry. My time's up.

A voice: You're fair.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): I would have gone on, but....

Nicole, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Fiske, in some of the places that our tour, our mission, has taken us, we have seen the most atrocious systemic racism on the part of government agencies, police services, doctors, even the entire population of a town. I cannot believe what I saw in Williams Lake. It is the most horrific place we had to visit. People there have not the slightest bit of respect for aboriginal communities.

You mentioned the mayor who said that a city had to take back its communities and parks. You would think we were in the southern United States in the 1960s. What is going on? What kind of country are we living in? Here we are telling the people who lived here before us, who welcomed us and allowed us to live on their land, that we have no use for them any more. We do not respect them, we do not give them what they are owed, we let them die, we let them be beaten, we let them go missing, and we do nothing. So what does that say about us? Whatever the members of this committee decide, whatever they recommend, what will it change?

Ms. Fiske, you have seen more than we have. Are we going to be able to change anything?

[*English*]

Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske: Canada has a very sad history, and Canada faces a huge challenge in our future. One of the biggest challenges we face is from those who would hear us today and deny the extent of the systemic racism.

You mentioned Williams Lake, and it brings tears to my eyes, because my husband and I moved our stepson from Williams Lake because of the racism against aboriginal children. We raised him away from there so he would be safe. So it's close to my heart.

I would say that this committee has the opportunity to make a difference. That difference will not be abrupt—it will be glacial—but it will be significant. I firmly believe, when I look at all of the research from around the world, when I look at the plight of the aborigine women of New Zealand, Australia, the United States, Latin America—and in December I was in Asia, looking at issues in Asian countries—that the most important thing this committee can do is go back to the Conservative government and tell them we need funding for the leading organizations of aboriginal women across the country. NWAC is, of course, with Sisters in Spirit, the most dramatic and best-known example. I could name many other aboriginal organizations here in Alberta.

We need to put them out front on this issue. By our actions we need to show that we trust them, recognize their rights, and have faith in their ability to take leadership and represent the women as their citizens. We need to hear them and respond to them.

We cannot continue to go on, as Caucasians who are part of this sordid history, berating ourselves, as I do, and expecting to still take the leading voice on it. We must show by every action where the leadership is, where the power is, and where the dignity is, because until we as a society put those women forward, we cannot protect them or value them.

● (1050)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Jo-Anne.

Now we will go to Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

I have just a quick comment before I go to Gloria.

Ms. Dzus raised something that I think gets neglected. People talk about residential schools, and that's not the end of the legacy around children. There were the residential schools. There was the sixties scoop, where children were removed from their homes and put in non-aboriginal homes. Now we have the ongoing 27,000-some first nations, Métis, and Inuit kids in foster care. So that has continued. I just want to put that on the record.

I also want to acknowledge a number of people who have spoken and said it's enough, no more reports. We want to see some concrete action that will make a difference in the lives of aboriginal women, their children and families, and non-aboriginal Canadians, because I don't think we can collectively heal until this happens.

Ms. Neapetung, you haven't had an opportunity to speak, so I would like to use my time to turn it over to you.

Ms. Gloria Neapetung (Representative, Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk and Movement): My name is Gloria Neapetung. I come from Yellow Quill, Saskatchewan. I'm an activist artist. I'm also a street survivor. I was drug-addicted, alcohol-addicted, and abused from the age of one or two. I worked on the street from the age of 13 until I was 34, dealing with violence, prostitution, and drug addiction. I did a lot of things when I was young. I also had six children.

I put my children in care because I knew I wasn't healthy. My children needed to grow up knowing they didn't have to deal with a drug-addicted mom and a father who was as well. I stayed with my husband for 18 years.

In 1992 I had an encounter with a serial killer in Saskatoon. In 1993 the RCMP came to see me in Regina. I took a lot of risks with my life when I stepped into vehicles. But in 1993, that's when I felt the RCMP didn't hear me or believe what I was saying to them. In 2004 I was arrested for accessory after the fact to murder. My co-accused murdered two men that year, and I was sent to the Edmonton Institution for Women.

I learned to manage who I am today and grow as a person, but I think back to working on the streets, getting into those vehicles, and not knowing who I could go to for help. There is SWAP in Regina, EGADZ in Saskatoon, and PAAFE here in Edmonton. There is Sage House in Winnipeg. I know about all these organizations because I wanted to work with them with the institution here. A lot of the women come from those places, and I wanted to let them know they are not all about condoms and needles, because that's why those women go to those organizations.

They don't know that they have programs or things to help them get off the street. I lived there, and that was the ugliest place I ever lived. I was numb through those years of not knowing who I was. Today I'm a beautiful artist. I lived through damage, and the Creator walks with me today.

Going back to Saskatoon, until I started doing these walks with different organizations and working with homeless people and being homeless myself, I never realized that my life was important. With these organizations I work with, I feel devastated for the families, because my family would have been devastated if I had gone missing in 1992.

People who work with the sex trade workers or alcohol or drug addiction...when they talk about the family, the government should be working with the children and the family, because the children are addicted as well as the parents. To keep them off the streets is why I brought those organizations into the institution, and I'm doing it again this year. This is something I do on my own, because these women in the institution need to know there is help out there and we can stay clean.

It took me a long time to get this far, but thank you for listening.

● (1055)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Gloria, for sharing your story. It must have been very hard. You're a very brave woman.

We've got time, so I'd like to give you each one minute to give maybe a solution, an answer to something, or give us something that we can take back to Ottawa. What would you want? What's your wish?

Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske: In addition to the things I mentioned before, I would like the government and the RCMP to create a national database of people who've been violent against street workers. I would like them to be tracked more thoroughly and carefully. I feel there's a lot of oversight at that level of violence.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Suzanne.

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: A program to engage our men.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Yes, it seems to be something that we did not discuss very much today, the men's role in all this, because they play a big part too.

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: Seventy-eight percent of violence committed against aboriginal women is by men, male perpetration.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Right, exactly, and we should be dealing with that.

Ms. Suzanne Dzus: Just engage them.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Yes. Thank you.

Mike.

S/Sgt Mike Bartkus: If anything, I would like to see that we continue on along the path we've started in relation to a national missing persons program. There are regional initiatives in the west, with Project KARE, and the OPP Project Resolve. I'm sure you've heard about different ones as you've travelled around, but with the national missing persons database and the national website that's going to be created, there could be a missing person's component in each province that feeds into this national database. Then we can look at things like education, consistent policy procedures, and amendments to legislation to allow us to be able to share information when there's no criminal offence, for example, for a missing person. Those types of things will allow us increasing success and lower risks for missing persons.

On the homicide side of the house or the opportunity to...I know there are ongoing talks in relation to the lawful access....

You're cutting me off. I apologize. We can talk after.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): I'm sorry. That's all right. We will talk, yes.

April, what would you...?

Ms. April Wiberg: Thank you.

We definitely need a national aboriginal victims service to be a mandate, and also a national public service announcement to educate and raise awareness of the dangers out there experienced by aboriginal women and children. That could also be a message to the perpetrators that we're not going to continue to tolerate these types of crimes.

I am truly honoured to be here today. I keep hearing from a lot of people from my community. The elders have been saying for years that we all need to work together, and I think they meant it's not just in our aboriginal communities; it's for everybody, every citizen of Canada to start working together. The fact that we're all here today means this can actually happen. All of you hold the power to possibly stop another daughter, mother, or whoever from being murdered or going missing.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, April.

Gloria.

Ms. Gloria Neapetung: It's pretty much what April said. As I said, it's pretty traumatizing when someone's daughter goes missing or someone's son goes missing. Yes, there are men who go out there and work on the street and they do go missing or get murdered. They're not acknowledged a lot more than women are.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you.

That brings us to the close of this panel. I would like to thank everybody for appearing. You've given us some heavy, heavy things to think about, and there's a lot here. I thank you.

● (1055)

(Pause)

● (1055)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): If we can have everyone seated, we'll start.

In this session we have Sandra Lambertus and Jennifer Koshan. From the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, we have Muriel E. Stanley Venne.

We're going to start by giving each of you seven minutes to prove your point, to tell us what you're all about, and to give us some solutions, as we would like some answers.

Sandra, we'll start with you.

● (1100)

Dr. Sandra Lambertus (Author, As an Individual): Thank you.

I want to thank the members of the standing committee for the opportunity to present the findings of a research study I completed a few years ago. The information I'm presenting is based on a province-wide study of aboriginal women's experience of violence in Alberta. I made the report public in November 2007. I've since confirmed that the information is still current and relevant, and indeed some of the situations have actually worsened.

I want to point out to the standing committee that it's only been in the recent past that the proclivity toward aboriginal women's victimization in Canada has been acknowledged in statistical surveys and that the gap in information at the national level has naturally led to similar gaps at the provincial level, Alberta being no exception. The availability of statistics combined with political drive plays an important role in the determination of program availability and sustained funding. So when there are no actual statistics available, you can see how reticent politicians are to approve programs and to continue with funding for proven programs. Yet even without the quantitative information, front-line workers across the province knew experientially that aboriginal women have been overrepresented as victims of violent crimes for many, many years.

Some of the key points from the study that I'd like to make include the following.

Much of the violence involving aboriginal women, I found, does come from domestic violence as well as the sex trade, but ultimately, most of the people involved in the sex trade did experience some kind of family violence.

In Alberta, aboriginal women are more likely to experience converging intersections of risk factors for victimization, including poverty, social and geographic isolation, homelessness, lack of education, substance addiction, prostitution, and family dysfunction. No other category of women in Alberta experiences such a multitude of interwoven risk factors for victimization.

Flaws in the criminal justice system are probably the most insidious of the systemic factors that subvert aboriginal women's safety, because aboriginal women are often encouraged to access police and the courts to help them. The stories of the women reveal how the criminal justice system plays a role in their continuing victimization.

There are some patterns that the study revealed. For example, in families and communities where aboriginal women are frequently victimized with little or no redress, the children are often at higher risk for victimization and the community is usually unstable.

Chronic familial dysfunction that has not been effectively addressed is another one of the roots of aboriginal women's victimization. The roots of crime are also embedded in the violence that has not been addressed in communities.

Current crime prevention strategies to protect aboriginal women are not particularly successful, because the roots of crime are so pervasive and largely beyond the women's control. The women's suggestions and acknowledgement of services that made a difference to them centred on things such as empowerment, understanding, dignity, respect, compassion, and trust. These women are not asking for anything more than the basic necessities for healthy relationships and productive functioning in society.

The violence experienced by aboriginal women is largely outside their own locus of control, and that was a central finding of the study. Addressing this effectively requires commitments from all levels of government, the court, their communities, and their families. More needs to be done to strengthen services to victims in the short and medium term. But the long-term goal should be healthy and safe families and communities.

Programs to improve prospects of aboriginal women cannot be provided in isolation from what is also needed by their families and the communities in which they live. Programs must include counselling, healing, recovery, and skills training. It should be anticipated that in some communities significant change will take more than one or two generations. Ultimately, eliminating the victimization of aboriginal women is dependent upon efforts directed towards health, economic independence, and self-sufficiency for all aboriginal people. The long-term goal should be to create healthy families and safe communities. This is where aboriginal women and their families will probably thrive best.

Thank you very much.

● (1105)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Sandra, you went under. Very good.

Now we go to Jennifer. You have seven minutes.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan (Professor, University of Calgary, As an Individual): I just want to thank the committee very much for this opportunity to speak to you today. It's a real honour.

I'm an associate professor in the faculty of law at the University of Calgary. I'm also a former crown prosecutor. I worked for many years in the Northwest Territories, and I dealt with many cases of violence against aboriginal women at that time. That's the experience I bring to these discussions. Because my research focuses on legal responses to violence against aboriginal women, that's going to be the focus of my submission today.

I'll begin by placing the issue of legal responses to violence against aboriginal women in a bit of a factual context. I then have three main submissions to make, which I will illustrate with a concrete example. I'll then conclude by providing some recommendations that are related to my submission.

I know that you've heard many, many statistics as you've been travelling across the country looking at this issue of violence against aboriginal women, and I think it's important, for me anyway, to summarize those into two main points. First of all, violence against aboriginal women is more prevalent than violence against non-aboriginal women and violence against aboriginal men. The other thing is that there are distinctive forms of violence against aboriginal women and distinctive impacts that violence has on aboriginal women, and that sometimes requires distinctive kinds of solutions. For example, aboriginal women are three times more likely to be victims of spousal abuse compared to other victims of spousal abuse.

My own research shows that we often see the involvement of aboriginal women in the criminal and civil justice systems as disproportionate to their numbers in the population. We have about 5% aboriginal people in the population of Alberta. My research on Calgary's specialized domestic violence court shows that about 11% of cases heard by the court involve aboriginal victims. That's two times higher than their overall numbers in our population.

Similarly, my research on provincial family violence legislation shows that a disproportionate number of aboriginal women—22%—are involved as claimants in applications for emergency protection orders. That's more than four times the number of aboriginal women in the population.

At the same time, and you heard this, this morning, from the Edmonton Police Service, there's no requirement on the police to gather information about the ethnicity or race of the people they're seeing. I think that's one example of a very concrete recommendation that this committee could make. It's critically important for us to be able to measure the impact that the justice system and its response has on aboriginal victims of violence. Police need to be gathering that information so we can measure that impact.

Aboriginal women are also at a higher risk of sexual violence by a factor of about seven times and are at a higher risk of homicide by a factor of eight times. It's excellent to have the Statistics Canada reports on family violence that come out every year, but again, those reports don't always break down the level of violence that is being experienced by aboriginal women. So I think another concrete recommendation that this committee could make would be to have Statistics Canada always show in its reports on violence—whether that's family violence or sexual violence—what's the particular impact on aboriginal women that we're seeing.

When we take into account the fact that violence against women, including aboriginal women, is vastly underreported, these numbers we're seeing are really only the tip of the iceberg. In addition to the prevalence of violence against aboriginal women, as I said, it's also important for us to recognize that certain forms of violence may be uniquely experienced by aboriginal women, and these forms of violence are related to ongoing colonization and the oppression of aboriginal women in Canadian society. So I think we can consider the horrible phenomenon of missing and murdered aboriginal women to be a form of violence that is really uniquely experienced by this group of women, and the same is true of the abuse of aboriginal women in residential schools.

That factual context leads me to make three main submissions. First of all, we must acknowledge that aboriginal peoples live under continuing conditions of colonization and oppression in Canada. This has an impact on the levels and kinds of violence that are faced by aboriginal women and on the solutions that are appropriate.

Second, it's critical that the voices of aboriginal women and their representative organizations be given prominence and priority in proposing responses to the violence they face, and I agree with the comments that Jo-Anne Fiske made on that matter earlier this morning. The involvement of aboriginal women is critical, whether we're talking about aboriginal solutions to violence, pursuant to self-government or aboriginal justice kinds of initiatives, or whether we're talking about responses that fall within the realm of Canadian law and policy.

Third, as long as Canadian laws continue to apply to aboriginal peoples, the development and implementation of those laws must always pay special attention to the needs and concerns of aboriginal women and their communities.

Just as a bit of an aside, I want to say that one of my proudest moments as a Canadian citizen in recent years was to watch the apology the federal government gave to survivors of residential schools in the House of Commons and to see Bev Jacobs, who was at the time the president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, stand up and make a response to that apology. That was the first time the Native Women's Association of Canada has ever been given that sort of formal voice as citizens of Canada, and I think that was a real turning point. Aboriginal women were not able to participate in constitutional reform negotiations; they're often still excluded from discussions that take place about the sorts of laws and policies we should have in Canadian society, even though those laws are going to impact them tremendously given the prevalence of violence against them; and it is absolutely critical that aboriginal women and their organizations always have a voice around that table.

Do I still have a bit of time? I'm cut off.

● (1110)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): That's it.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Okay. Maybe in the questions I can get to some of my specific recommendations.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): In the questions you'll get a chance, definitely.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Muriel.

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne (President and Founder, Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women): First I want to thank all of you, as my sisters. You've come together to implement the standing committee. That is to be noted with much appreciation by myself, as the president of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, vice-president of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and chair of the Aboriginal Commission on Human Rights and Justice.

I've been around so long that it scares me, actually. I've seen over the years how both Conservative and the Liberal governments have deliberately underfunded the aboriginal women's anything. We've done reports and reports in this province—and I have to do my reading notes, too. But it was $150,000 for aboriginal women. It was the only program that ever existed for aboriginal women, $150,000 for the province of Alberta. They used to give us half because we're a bigger organization and we reach out to a wide area of women, but now they've divided it up into little pieces so that nobody can accomplish anything.

I must present my written paper.

I want to say that we have made our submission to you, and I have received recognition, the Order of Canada, and been cited at the United Nations for my work in the area of helping aboriginal women, children, and families. I'm very proud of that, but it hasn't changed anything. It has not changed anything. It has not given us one penny more to work with. It has not done a thing, even though I wrote to the minister, and I copied all the ministers, and I pleaded with him to realize the enormity of this situation—the enormity. I'm sure you've heard everyone talk about the enormity of the problem of aboriginal women being denigrated, killed, mutilated, left on a road or in a bush or in a motel or wherever. The slaughter of aboriginal women is what we're talking about, and it comes from the hatred.

I want to give you this example before I go on. The Saskatchewan Police College released posters to be used for target practice by the police in their province. This is a college. It was the image of an aboriginal woman. This was published in the *National Post* on February 19, 2001. To the uproar that came from many people about this poster that was used for target practice by the police, the response was, “No, no, it wasn't the image of an aboriginal woman; it was a Caucasian lady.” That should all make us feel good, right? They actually put the image of an aboriginal woman on a poster for target practice, and we have the bullet holes still where they had used it. Anne McLellan was the Minister of Justice. I phoned her and she phoned me back and assured me that those posters were removed.

That is the hatred against aboriginal women in a real-life demonstration. That's what we're up against. What I have learned over more than 30 years of working, as I am.... I was left for dead in the back alley of my home. I know whereof I speak, and I can tell you that my conclusion is that aboriginal women live in a country that is hostile to their very existence. That's shown in every statistic you would ever want to look at. And yet the enormity of this situation is not realized.

I want to see—I haven't got to my presentation yet—that every parliamentarian acknowledge that aboriginal women are the victims of the policies of this government, this government and every other government—not only this government but every other government. When I brought to the attention of the minister who responsible for Status of Women—I'll remember her name—I told her that the aboriginal women's program has not received an increase in 30 years, and actually was cut when Paul Martin did the cutting, and she turned to her assistant and said, “Oh, do we have that?” And she said, “Yes.”

She didn't even know there was this tiny, little aboriginal women's program across Canada.

● (1115)

I want to say there was a recommendation to increase the money to the Native Women's Association, but let me tell you, that is not enough. The money needs to go to the communities where the women are suffering; it needs to be brought to where the women are.

As you can see, I am not an impartial or a cool presenter, but I demand that this government and this committee, made up of women whom I consider my sisters, do everything in their power to bring this forward in every possible way.

I had asked Rona Ambrose to be the champion; we have no champion in Parliament. We have no one standing up and saying that aboriginal women must be considered. I had asked Ethel Blondin to be our champion.

Why is this? Would it deter their ability to get promoted? I don't know.

I wanted to spend as much time—

● (1120)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): I'm sorry, Muriel—

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: Am I out of time?

I have my written presentation.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Would you give it to the clerk so we can all see it later?

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: But just let me conclude.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Okay.

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: What is basic or fundamental to violence against aboriginal women in this country is the lack of funding to the women, to our organization and to every other organization in this country, to be able to be full citizens. They're not full citizens; they take the brunt of the hatred that pervades....

I urge you, I beg you, to make the strongest possible representations to the Government of Canada, because we have the programs. We are the experts. We know what needs to happen, but we don't have the money to go for that.

In the 16 years that we've been in existence, there hasn't been one year that we haven't struggled to keep our doors open, and it's because of the way in which aboriginal women have been treated, categorically, across this country.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you, Muriel.

Now we'll have a round of seven minutes of questions, and we'll start with Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, the three of you, for being here most of the morning.

I'm going to direct my questions primarily at you, Jennifer. I'll put my questions out and you can answer however you want.

I'd like to know what recommendations of yours you didn't get to.

I'd also like to know if you have done any work on the current government's crime bills and their impact on women. We've asked for some information, which we've not received yet. We're looking at it through Parliament, but I'd be interested to know if you've done anything on them.

Thirdly, one of the issues that has come up in the discussions is that there are many aboriginal women who are incarcerated, and I want to know if you have done any work on whether the reason for their incarceration is in response to violence against them.

I'll let you go with those.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Thanks.

I think I'll start with your second and third questions and then come back to the first one about my recommendations.

I haven't done specific research on the impact of the government's new crime bills on aboriginal women, but I do think it's fair to say the following, because aboriginal women face violence more often and in unique forms.

Every single time the government passes a law that has any relation to violence against women, or even violence more broadly, that law is always going to have a specific impact on aboriginal women. That has to be acknowledged, and aboriginal women therefore have to have a role in the development of that law and in the implementation of that law, because it is always going to have a specific impact on them, given what we see in the statistics.

Again, I haven't done specific research myself on the incarceration of aboriginal women, but I think there is research out there that shows that aboriginal women who are incarcerated are victims of violence themselves. Even if the particular incident that led to whatever placed them in jail was not one in which they were defending themselves, overall they are still experiencing colonization and oppression, and it is reactions to that colonization and oppression that end up with their being criminalized. I think the Elizabeth Fry Society of Canada has done some really excellent work on that topic, and works closely with aboriginal women in doing that research.

As far as my recommendations are concerned, I've already talked a little bit about the importance of information gathering. I think mandating police as well as Statistics Canada to collect that information is key. I've talked about the importance of ensuring that every time legal responses to violence against women are made, aboriginal women have to be involved in those developments and in the implementations of those laws. They have to have adequate funding to enable them to have that consultative role.

It's important that there be specialized education and services for aboriginal women to assist them in navigating the civil and criminal justice systems, because we know that crime is underreported. There is the fear of racism within the criminal justice system, and if aboriginal women have actually taken the step of engaging with the justice system, adequate supports need to be in place for that to happen.

On the jurisdictional front, the issue of how governments can work together to try to solve some of these issues came up earlier this morning. I think there are strong models already in place for that kind of approach. The federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of justice sometimes combine their efforts to deal with particular issues, and I think the issue of violence against women is an area in which it's critical for all levels of government to come together with aboriginal leaders and aboriginal women's organizations to try to achieve those solutions.

I think I'll leave it at that so that other people can....

● (1125)

Hon. Anita Neville: Do I have any more time?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Yes, you have about two and half minutes.

Hon. Anita Neville: Okay.

Muriel, you obviously want to respond to these questions.

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: I wanted to note that there was an aboriginal women's summit held in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Have you ever seen the results of that?

Hon. Anita Neville: I was not at the Corner Brook one, but I was at the one that was held in Yellowknife, and yes, I have.

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: I think it's fair to say that nothing has come of it.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Sandra, I am particularly interested in the justice system, as you heard in my questions this morning, and in what your research and experience have shown. I'm not solely interested in it, but I am focusing a little bit on it.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: This is a huge report with the findings that I have in it, and seven minutes just doesn't give it enough time, but one of my concerns is with provincial victims services programs.

These programs are supposed to be front-line service providers for people who have been victims of crime, and also provide extra funding, but oftentimes in Alberta they are police-based, and that in itself becomes a barrier for women seeking help. Another problem is that because they're police-based, these victims services are not mandated to provide services in cases of double-charging. Most times when double-charging is involved, particularly in a domestic violence situation, the police have not done good investigations. They just say, “Let's just charge them both.” It's like having a motor vehicle accident; people just say, “Well, you both have to pay for your own”, and that's—

Hon. Anita Neville: Has this come out in your research?

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: Absolutely. I checked, and this is still happening.

Another issue with victims services is not so much out of the justice piece, but that the services are based on a middle-class, non-aboriginal model in which people in a community might have the resources to offer their volunteer time, but when they try to apply that model to aboriginal communities, they're forgetting that in some communities there are not a lot of people who have that kind of resource. They can't afford to buy gas for their cars to go visit victims. If they've already been victimized themselves, becoming a helper for other people can actually trigger a lot of the memories for themselves, so burnout rates are horrible. There's a huge problem throughout the province in getting aboriginal people in their communities to volunteer because there's too much baggage for them. It's too much. It's too heavy. At the end of the day, they deserve to be paid because their problems are important.

● (1130)

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you.

We now go to Madame Demers.

Nicole.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning. Thanks to our witnesses for being here this morning.

I am happy that your presentations are over this morning. We really needed a kind of cooling-down period. It was a very emotional climate and we probably needed to get back on a more rational track. That was quite difficult for me. I am a very passionate woman, and I lost it a little this morning. It was very hard.

Muriel, tell me what you think of the perpetuation of colonial attitudes when bills like the one on matrimonial rights are imposed. Aboriginal women's groups were not consulted and the result will be that the violence will continue. If the bill is passed, aboriginal women will not really be able to exercise their rights.

[*English*]

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: I would certainly advise that there be consultation before the implementation of the bill. It's critical that the women be consulted, because, as you say, it could possibly result in more violence and more disruption. It's long overdue, but it's just one in the list of many violations of aboriginal women's rights in this country. It's good. I applaud the actions by the government to address this, but without the concurrence and the realization of the effects, the good part may be lost. I'm hoping this can still happen.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Jennifer.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: There's an issue that is quite similar to the application of matrimonial property legislation on first nations reserves, and that's the issue of provincial family violence legislation. That's an area I've done quite a bit of research on. That was actually going to be my concrete example, but I ran out of time before I could give it.

One issue with that legislation is that police often don't enforce it on reserve. Even though I don't think there's the same sort of constitutional barrier to the application of family violence legislation on reserve, police seem to be under a misapprehension about that. That's really depriving aboriginal women of a key tool to help protect them against family violence. This kind of law allows them to phone 24 hours a day and get an emergency protection order, exclusive possession of their family home, and a no-contact order, but police are not adequately enforcing this legislation on reserve. Even outside of reserve communities, we see that sometimes RCMP officers move into a new jurisdiction and they're not even aware that this legislation exists. Even within the city, even off reserve, they're failing to make the best use of these really important laws. Another important recommendation is—and you've heard this already—that there be education for police officers, both RCMP and provincial, as well as awareness about violence against aboriginal women.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you.

Sandra, you talked to us a lot about the importance of statistics. Could you tell us what you think about the long-form census disappearing?

[*English*]

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: Well, I disagree with it, because I think we need to have that additional information. At the end of the day, politicians and policy-makers look at those kinds of reports and findings. Without those, I don't believe they'll be able to target well taxpayers' money into proper programs.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Jennifer, you told us that we do not have a lot of statistics on aboriginal women. Do you think that the abolition of the long-form census will make that problem worse?

[*English*]

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: I do think that's a problem. I would strongly advocate the reinstatement of that long-form census. It's critical information.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Muriel, in the meetings we have held, we have heard a lot about how difficult it is for aboriginal women to make any progress, even when they are educated and have the opportunity to go to college or university. We were told that they had to break through a kind of wolfskin ceiling, and that was harder for them than for those of us whose ceiling was glass. They said that they were stuck in conditions and in jobs that did not let them advance.

Could you tell me a little more about that?

[*English*]

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: An example, a real example, was Linda Bull, a professor at Athabasca University in this province. She was accused of shoplifting in the Safeway. She was so shocked and so disillusioned, and so angry and so frustrated. They eventually apologized to her, because of course it was nonsense, but they said it was a case of mistaken identity. So all they went on was her appearance.

You know, as an advocate with the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, it shouldn't surprise me, although it always has, that in cases where an aboriginal woman was found dead...or where, as this happened, the police beat this woman. I thought, well, this can't happen. It shouldn't happen. Then I took a look at her picture. I think the element of how Indian you look is very important. If you don't look really Indian, you get better treatment.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Dona Cadman): Thank you.

Next we have Madam Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of you for coming out and sharing your experiences with us. I just want to let you know and reassure you again that our government considers the ending of violence their top priority. Since 2007, through Status of Women Canada, the government has funded almost 150 projects across Canada. That totals almost $28.7 million. That work is to eliminate violence against women.

So we are supporting prevention and providing shelters on reserves and funding victims services. We want to ensure that the justice system also meets the needs of aboriginal women and their families.

To each one of you, are there any legal reforms or legislative changes that you guys can recommend and that we can carry forward?

Let's start with Sandra.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: I found that the outcomes of the processes of cases and investigations going to the crown were reliant on judges who too frequently gave the perpetrators of the crimes benefits of the doubt.

Both the aboriginal women I interviewed and certainly a lot of people in the helping professions identified that this sends a strong signal to the women, to the perpetrators, and to the community. So one of the findings was that judges need to be trained about the impacts, the long-term impacts, of their decisions. Not that we have to tell them what to decide, but they need to be very aware of what happens in aboriginal communities when perpetrators are not asked to be accountable.

● (1140)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Jennifer.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I agree that judicial education is key. We've talked a lot about education of police and so on, but I think because judges obviously play such a huge role in the justice system, they also need to receive specialized training and education on violence against aboriginal women.

I go back to the same point I've made before, that whatever law reforms and legal changes we look at, or, even beyond that, every time a new law on violence is being considered by the Government of Canada, the law has to be considered with the perspective of aboriginal women in mind. So aboriginal women always have to have a seat at the table to be able to discuss specifically what those changes in the law are going to mean for them and what sort of impact they are going to have.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Muriel.

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: I'm pleased to agree on the screening of judges—and they should be screened before they become judges—and also police officers in recruiting. Especially police officers should be screened as to their prejudices and their biases and their discrimination against aboriginal women.

We did research with the Edmonton Police Service and the RCMP, and we asked them very simple questions about whether they had taken training, and of course they hadn't.

The Edmonton Police Service changed our survey, which made the survey invalid, because they weren't the same questions. They changed it despite our protests, and one of the respondents told us to save our money and give it to the Indians on welfare, because we couldn't even do a survey. In some ways it did us a favour, because it brought out the racism against us.

But this can be found out in the screening process. You can find out the prejudices at every level, and that may be one of the concrete ways in which the government at all levels can address racism.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Madam Chair, do I have more time left?

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): You have about two more minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: The rest of my time, Madam Chair, I'll pass on to my colleague, Dona.

Dona, you can ask some questions.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Okay.

I was thinking that no woman—aboriginal, white, yellow, brown, pink, purple—should have to live in fear of rape or abuse. Now, you say you want the money to go to the communities. Do these communities have something, a group that is there for aboriginal women, about them, for them, and run by them? Are there such services that this money could go to in these communities?

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: Oh, I'm so glad you asked that question. No, there aren't, because of the lack of funding at the regional level. The money all goes to the national organizations.

Ms. Dona Cadman: So the national organizations are not giving you your money. Is that it?

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: Oh, no. We never.... That's totally unreasonable for them to give us money, and I mean that in every—

Ms. Dona Cadman: Well, aren't they supposed to?

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: No.

Mrs. Donna Cadman: Why not?

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: Because the rule of the government is that only the national organizations will be funded.

Ms. Dona Cadman: So any little organization will not be?

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: Well, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women has been pleading and asking for stable funding, core funding, any kind of stable funding that will keep our doors open, because we have 16 chapters, but one of the greatest difficulties we face is that we have projects. Projects, projects, projects. So the project starts, we have to write the proposal, we do the work, we write a report, and then we can't get the same project. We can't continue what we started. We are constantly being told that, you know, the criteria have now changed. So they do not respect the aboriginal women's organizations such as ours to be able to address the needs, and we can do it. We can do it.

What has happened is that we have a project, we go out to the women, and we talk to them. We get them all involved and so on, and then our project ends and then we have to dream up something else or do something else. That is an absolutely direct message to the present government, and it was done by the Liberal government too. It stops us from becoming, as I said before, full citizens. We do this dance. We contort ourselves into all kinds of shapes to receive money on a project. So if we could look at a 10-year-plan, as we have declared the Decade of Difference for aboriginal women—which is included in my report—if we could look at some stability in which we could build the confidence in the communities and work with the women, they wouldn't go into the justice system. They wouldn't be arrested by the police. They're definitely afraid of the police, and the police are not their friends. It's the way it is. All the statistics prove that to you.

I think the wonderful thing would be to review the whole way in which aboriginal women are funded, direct them to the organizations that can reach them in the communities, because it's not good enough just to have a community organization. You have to have the leadership at the top to bring information, share information, work with the women, and have the confidence of the women. That's what's missing.

● (1145)

Ms. Dona Cadman: Do you have one lady—

The Chair: Your time is up. Thank you.

Now I will go to Ms. Crowder for the NDP.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Madam Chair. Nice to see you.

I want to thank you as well for coming and listening to a lot of the testimony. I have a brief comment before my question. It actually saddens me to hear what you're saying, because back in 2004-05 a number of us sitting at this table on the status of women committee did an extensive study on what women's organizations—it was broadly women's organizations—needed in order to continue to provide the very good work that they were doing, and the clear, consistent, strong message was that they need core, consistent, sustainable funding. And here we are in 2011 hearing exactly the same message from you, all these years later, and what we know over the last five or six years is that women's organizations have in fact been weakened even further. So I think it's a very grim fact that we're hearing that message once again.

My question is this. I wonder if any of you are aware of anyone who has taken a look at how the Indian Act contributes to perpetuating the ongoing victimization of women?

Sandra, could we start with you and then just go across?

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: No, I have to say not directly, but I also have to say that when I was conducting the research across Alberta, I did come across some communities that, from within, were really working towards becoming healthy and productive. I don't know if they had really strong women's organizations, but I know that they were definitely grassroots. Again, the problem was having stable funding, but even those communities, because they wanted it to come from within, really wanted to create the community just coming together, and I think a couple of them were actually successful.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Sandra, before I go to Jennifer, if I could take what you're saying to the next step, what I'm hearing you say is that there are communities out there that are successfully working around healing and moving on.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: They are working on it, yes.

● (1150)

Ms. Jean Crowder: What might be helpful—and I'm leaping to a recommendation that you haven't made—is to know who some of those communities are and what elements were in place in order to help them take on those challenges.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: I'm thinking of Fort Chipewyan in particular. It's a very isolated northern community. In my discussions with the chief at the time, he talked about how they decided several decades earlier that they wanted to change the violence in their communities. They approached the federal government for funding. The federal government was actually very reticent about providing anything, but they stuck with it and actually came up with their own homegrown treatment programs and counselling services. It's an amazing and very tiny community, but they've come a long way.

Again, the chief himself said it had to do with leadership, because if you don't have that kind of leadership, it won't happen.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Right. Thank you.

Jennifer, would you comment on the Indian Act?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I'm glad to have a chance to address this point, because there's a bill before Parliament right now dealing with Indian status and band membership for aboriginal women arising out of the Sharon McIvor case. Sharon McIvor has been a huge figure and is really a leader in the aboriginal women's community on the question of rights for aboriginal women. She has staunchly critiqued the bill that's currently before Parliament. It doesn't rectify all the problems—

Ms. Jean Crowder: It's actually passed.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Oh, it has. Okay.

The issue I want to address is that in this situation, again the voices of aboriginal women were not listened to, and that lack of respect does lead to violence against aboriginal women. I think you've heard that repeatedly over the course of the morning, and while the Indian Act itself doesn't necessarily say anything specifically against violence against women, it's the fact that the voices of aboriginal women continue to be denied that allows that kind of violence to go on. The passing of that bill is just the latest example, and it's a real travesty.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Muriel, would you comment?

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: I first want to compliment the government on endorsing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is, to my mind, a very hopeful and very real opportunity for all of us as Canadians to address the needs of aboriginal women in full consultation with them.

For every aboriginal woman I know, the Indian Act was very harmful. It went from denying their rights to be an Indian to denying their own identity to everything else that's included in that act. I have stated many times that every single act of discrimination against indigenous people has been legislated by the government. There is no other way to state that. Everything that has been done has been legislated by the government. When they were taking away the children, by law they had no defence. We as Canadians need to address the horrific outcome of legislating against, as Madam Demers said, the people of this land.

I'm not saying you're guilty. I'm saying we need to address it in a very wonderful way. Canada can become the best country in the world if it addresses the needs of aboriginal women, because on the international, on the national, and on the global scene, Canada has not treated aboriginal women right.

They are the blight on Canada, and will continue to be the blight unless some real things are done. It can be done. This is what keeps my hope up. Yes, there are measures that can be taken in the communities and by our leadership, by every parliamentarian, and at every level to identify this and to take it on as Canadian leaders so that this can happen.

So I ask you, as the leaders of our country, to address this in every kind of passionate way.

● (1155)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to a second round. The second round is a five-minute round—in other words, five minutes for questions and answers.

We will begin again with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much.

There are two areas that I want to explore with you. Let me start with the first one, which we haven't talked a lot about today but which has come up considerably in our discussions with other panels, and that is the relationship between violence against women and the apprehension of children.

I'm just wondering if any of you or all of you....

Jennifer, you are nodding. Go ahead with your comments on that.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I think fear of the apprehension of children is one of the main things that keeps aboriginal women from reporting violence to the police, because as soon as social services or child welfare finds out there is violence in that home, and if the woman has not left the home, the solution seems to be to remove the children.

I think this is a very complicated issue, because it's really important to recognize that violence does have an impact on children, whether they are aboriginal children or non-aboriginal children. But still, the rapidity with which social services seems to think the solution to this problem is to remove the children, rather than put resources into that family to allow the family to remain together, or perhaps to remove the man rather than the children, is a huge barrier to the reporting of domestic violence by aboriginal women.

Hon. Anita Neville: You had the recommendation of removing the man. Do you have other concrete recommendations on that?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: We need to provide the services and supports to the family to allow the children to remain within the family.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Sandra, go ahead.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: I'd like to extend that as well.

A lot of the women I interviewed talked about losing their children and how that actually prompted them into taking greater risks in their lives, sometimes engaging in drugs and prostitution. It really led to their spiralling downwards.

Hon. Anita Neville: Was that was because of the removal of the children?

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: Absolutely, and they go through a lot of grief. So one can imagine how that would prompt them not to bother phoning the police or engaging the criminal justice system at all, no matter what the incident was.

Hon. Anita Neville: Muriel.

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: The saddest story I ever heard was from a mother who gave birth to her baby and a worker came in and said, “I'll watch the baby and you can take a shower.” When she came back, the baby was gone. If as a mother you lost your newborn, you'd go crazy—and that is what happens. It's so inhumane; it's so wrong. We as women need to say in the strongest terms that the apprehension of children has to stop.

This conversation just began casually, and then I talked with her about the loss of a child and she told me the story. I have never forgotten it. What she did to try to cope was this. She was in Edmonton and she moved to Slave Lake. She had heard that the social workers were better in Slave Lake, and she did get her child back.

But to arbitrarily take a baby out of a mother's arms is just inhumane. It's not respecting what we as women recognize.

I think we have to bring this back to the table and deny the authorities that right.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

● (1200)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Anita Neville: That's fine.

The Chair: Now I'll go to Ms. Grewal for the Conservatives for five minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Obviously, when all of us are sitting around this table talking about violence against aboriginal women, I think there is a perpetrator, and the perpetrator is a man. According to you, are there any programs for men so they can come out of all this violent behaviour?

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: We had a declaration on the Decade of Difference for aboriginal women, which we proclaimed in 2005. A man and his wife drove all the way from High Prairie, Alberta, which is quite a way up north, to be there. What he said to me, and I admire him for his courage, was, “The woman goes in for treatment for 28 days, and when she comes out, the man is just the same.” He said he was trying to start a men's group in High Prairie. He was talking to the men and trying to convince them that they should come together and talk about the violence, but he was having a really rough time.

My thought is that this man was very courageous, very determined, and that's where it has to happen. It won't happen by women's organizations saying, “Oh, you men, you have to do this.” That won't work. The men themselves have to do this, with our support, of course, but not with us taking the lead.

I wanted to bring up one quick example. When the massacre of women happened at École Polytechnique, one of the mothers came to Edmonton to one of the ceremonies, and she said she had tried to get any women's organization to look at the role of men and how men were being brought up. She, as a mother, said, “We have boys; we need to nurture them.” She was totally blocked. No women's organization would listen to her. But I think she needs to be listened to. Even though it's several years now, I think nothing has improved, so the idea that the government may consider assisting men who are dedicated to changing their attitudes and the lives of the women they are with, that may be a startling new initiative that could happen.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Jennifer, do you have any thoughts on that?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I have just a couple of things to add. I think in addition to the importance of having specialized treatment for aboriginal men who are perpetrators of violence, we also have to recognize that systemic problems continue in Canada and that aboriginal men are also victims of ongoing colonization and oppression. Until we deal with those issues as a Canadian society, we're not going to deal with the systemic nature of this violence, and that's an issue for aboriginal men as well as for aboriginal women.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Sandra.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: I agree with both of the previous two speakers, but I would like to add that I am aware of at least one program for abusive men in Fort McMurray that was initiated by the women's shelter, and they've been funded for this for a few years. They're finding it quite successful. Oftentimes, their participants are mandated by the courts.

On my communications with them, when aboriginal men come they often don't stick around very long, and it's really unfortunate. There's obviously something missing in the programming and the delivery, so perhaps that's something that should be looked into.

● (1205)

The Chair: Sorry, Dona, you only have 10 seconds.

Ms. Dona Cadman: I would like to know how many aboriginal women there are in Canada, and if there is one woman who could group you all together, be a figurehead, and come forward to fight for you.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: I don't have my statistics handy.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Do you have an average?

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: The aboriginal population is one of the fastest growing in Canada, and that's also true in Alberta. I hesitate to say. I ignored my statistics for today. I think it's between 5% and 8%.

The Chair: Can I ask someone to think about that? Maybe at the end of the session, if you can get that data or at least have something to offer on Dona's question, we can go back to it. We may be able to have another round in which we can explore that again.

Now I'll go to Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Jennifer, I would like to go back to Bill C-31. That is where we see the importance of the education and awareness that you were talking about earlier.

After having consulted Quebec Native Women and all the aboriginal women's groups in Quebec, our caucus had decided to vote against Bill C-31. A few weeks before the final vote, aboriginal women's groups contacted us and said that they had changed their minds and that we had to vote for it. They said that, even if the bill affected only one or two children, at least they would be accepted and recognized by the community and would become full members of it.

It is very difficult. All through this mission that we have set for ourselves, we have heard a lot of stories that have made us understand how important it is for mothers and grandmothers to see that their children are accepted by the community. That is why we rose to vote for the bill.

You are telling me today that we should have voted against it. But we voted for it because that was what the communities wanted.

So where should we get our information from? How are we supposed to react? How do we know that we reacted correctly? I just don't know any more.

Personally, I do not like making decisions for other people. I would like to be sure that the decisions that are made come from the people I represent, and not from me.

[*English*]

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I have a couple of thoughts as a result of what you've said. First of all, no one speaks with one voice. We have a huge diversity of aboriginal people across the country, so we need to recognize that aboriginal women are not going to speak with one voice, whether it's on Bill C-3 or on issues of violence against women. It's important to hear all of those different voices.

I know in politics sometimes compromises have to be made, so I understand the difficulty of the situation you are facing. But I think, again, there's a more fundamental systemic issue here, and that's the ongoing colonization of the aboriginal peoples of Canada through the Indian Act. So we're tinkering with that through Bill C-3. We're not addressing the fundamental systemic problem of that ongoing colonial document, and that needs to be addressed.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Muriel, what do we have to do to convince the government to stop funding projects? It is true that $28 million has been invested since 2007, but the money has gone to 200 projects, meaning $10,000 per project. You do not get very far with that. It means 8 months per project, 10 months, 12 months. How do we make the government understand that we do not need 200 projects funded at $10,000 each? To make long-term changes and to make a difference, we have to take the $28 million and spend it on four or five projects.

[*English*]

The Chair: We've gone over time here, but I will give you an opportunity to very quickly respond, if you can.

Muriel.

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: The amount of money is not sufficient; $23 million is nothing. Divide it up across the country and you have nothing. The question, as I understand it, was how can we better appropriate the funding to realize some results. Number one, stop the $10,000 to $20,000. They have denied totally the cost of administration. So my question was, do we run it out of the parking lot? I think there needs to be a national strategy and a coming together. We did have the aboriginal women's summit, which nobody seems to know about or read about. I don't think it's even been brought to the attention of Parliament, although it was hosted by the premier of Newfoundland and the premier of B.C.

I think there is a mechanism, which I would love to be a part of, to assess the long-term value and the long-term progress that needs to be made. But I must say I liked the ideas that have come before me, which is a national campaign, national awareness, national acknowledgement of the aboriginal women in this country—who are brilliant, by the way. I hope and pray that you will read my presentation, because we have done that. We have the Esquao awards. Esquao is a beautiful Cree word for “woman”, which has been stylized, and we honour our women. But we are very different in our honouring. We have no jury. The communities nominate the women and we honour them. It has created such goodwill in this province among the women because there isn't one woman in this province who will not be honoured. If their community, or their mother, or their son, or their father nominates them, they will be honoured. So they get their 15 minutes of fame on television.

I would love to be part of a campaign to bring this forward to the Canadian people, because we also have social justice awards in which we have honoured, for instance, Irene Khan, who was the secretary general of Amnesty International, who did what we couldn't do, which is bring the issue of the deaths of aboriginal women to the international scene.

There are exciting ways to address this issue. The incidents are horrific, but that does not mean that we cannot progress in this country and make it welcoming to aboriginal women.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I am going to go to Ms. Crowder now for five minutes, because she has to leave in five minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm going to apologize, because I have to bolt. I have a plane to catch.

I wanted to comment, Muriel, that I absolutely have read the summit reports. I attended the second summit and I agree there has not been any action.

My question, Jennifer—and you and Sandra raised it a couple of times—is around the need to examine the impact on aboriginal women when policies and legislation are developed. I think you only have to look to matrimonial real property to see how that hasn't played out. There was a ministerial representative's report; Wendy Grant-John did a very good report, which was disregarded when the legislation was developed. The Native Women's Association and other organizations did a minimal consultation process because they weren't funded and there wasn't enough time, and their findings were largely disregarded, so even when people are asked for their views and opinions when the legislation is developed, it simply doesn't happen.

In theory, departments do a gender-based analysis, a GBA, when they examine any legislation, but we know from witnesses who came before the status of women committee in 2004-05 that it's largely lip service: “Let's check—yes, we did it.”

If the gender-based analysis could be implemented in a more meaningful way and have the impact on aboriginal women incorporated into it, do you think that would help?

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: I think it would. I think any time you can involve the grassroots, the people who actually experience this stuff, it is always valuable, and it's more valuable than having one representative from each province give some kind of feedback.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Well, I think it touches a point. I'll come back to you.

There is no pan-aboriginal woman, so to have one voice out of each province or one voice nationally try to represent the interests of aboriginal women simply isn't realistic.

Would you comment, Jennifer?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I agree with that. On the consultation front, I teach constitutional law, so I teach the duty to consult and the duty to accommodate. I think sometimes we forget about the accommodation piece. We think about the consultation piece, but once those consultations are done, they have to actually find their way into whatever response the government makes.

Rather than having legislation litigated once it's developed—because it hasn't done a proper job of accounting for the diverse needs of aboriginal women—why not actually make that accommodation at the time that legal responses are developed, rather than having to go through challenges like Sharon McIvor's after the fact?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Jennifer, just to come back on that point, I'm not a lawyer, and I'm certainly not a constitutional expert, but is there a way to develop legislation that is more flexible and that can recognize the nation differences? We are talking about nations within nations here. Is there a way to develop legislation that recognizes those differences?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I think there is. You can have a piece of legislation that has important general principles that may be broadly applicable, but then the legislation can be implemented through different sets of regulations and different policies and practices. It's at that level of policy and practices that issues of diversity can be taken into account and tailored to the needs of particular communities.

Ms. Jean Crowder: With regard to the matrimonial and real property legislation, although it's not applicable for people who have developed custom code, it is a one-size-fits-all and it's across provincial boundaries. A lot of it's going to be reliant on provincial legislation until people develop their own custom codes.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: But I think there are ways to meaningfully implement those broader principles at the community level, and it's really important for that to happen.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Muriel, you look as though you want to say something about this.

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: Yes. The consultation and the representation can easily be addressed by giving the representative the resources to consult with her own women. It's not impossible. You don't send someone there out of the blue; you send them there empowered with the voice of the women, and those are resources to consult with the women. That makes a lot of sense to me.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

It's now one minute past your leaving time, so thank you very much for doing that.

We have nine minutes left. I think it would be pretty difficult to do a three-minute round in that time, so I would like to go back to the question that was asked by Dona—was it Dona who asked it?—about the percentage of aboriginal women in the population, etc.

Sandra.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: These statistics still need to be updated, but at the time of the 2001 Statistics Canada census, Canada's aboriginal population was about 1,066,500, representing 3.4% of Canada's population; however, the population is growing faster than the total population. The highest concentrations will continue to grow, particularly in the prairies and the north. In 2001, Alberta's aboriginal population was approximately 200,000, representing about 5% of Alberta's population. The median age of aboriginal people in Canada and in Alberta was about 12 years younger than the median age of Canadians overall.

I hope that gives some context.

The Chair: Does that answer what you wanted to know, Dona, or is there something else?

Ms. Dona Cadman: Not really.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: Oh, sorry.

Ms. Dona Cadman: It was really just women. I wanted to know how many women. Did they not do a census on that?

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: No.

Ms. Dona Cadman: You're lumped in with the men?

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: That's right.

The Chair: Julie said that she could give you that information on the 2006 census. Would that be more accurate?

Ms. Dona Cadman: Yes, that would be better.

The Chair: But I think you also wanted to know if there was *a* woman, and I think it was answered subsequently in different venues that there is no one women, no more than we would expect that for non-aboriginal women we're going to find one women to represent them all. I think it's about looking at communities.

I wanted to ask a question since we have about four minutes left. We were discussing amongst ourselves last night because we heard so many things that are really overwhelming. We're hearing them, and they are beginning to filter in to some really common issues that we can see—systemic racism, etc., and all those kinds of things. Then we said, but what do we do? What is it we can do? Many of them are so terribly complex.

When you talk about things—and I'd like to direct part of this to Jennifer, as a constitutional law expert—when you talk about taking children away from their parents, we hear this is a provincial jurisdiction. This is a question. How do we do something, as a federal government, when it is within provincial jurisdiction?

We have also heard, for instance, that if you wanted to take the man and move him out of the offending home—the violent man—in fact, you might be able to do it in urban areas or off reserve, but on reserve it is sometimes impossible, again because of ownership of the home and a whole lot of other things. Also, where does he go in the community if you kick him out? So quite a lot of times the women run away into the cities, where they're again under provincial jurisdiction. For many of us, the apprehension of children was a seminal problem, really, because it continued the violence generation after generation, knowing that about 45% of all children in any violent household either tend to become violent themselves or marry or hook up with people who are potentially violent.

So my question is this. How do we break the cycle? The cycle breaking is the first thing. I want to hear from you, Jennifer. Under the Constitution, does the province have jurisdiction over aboriginal peoples to that extent? Has the federal government a role to play in taking care of this issue and looking at apprehension of aboriginal children and stopping it, or whatever is necessary to do? That is a huge piece that I have not understood.

● (1255)

What is the role of the federal government and what is its responsibility toward aboriginal people, both off reserve and on reserve? You might have some answers for that.

Secondly—and I know we've talked about this around and around—the social worker is saying, “But I have to protect this kid because there's violence and the mother is addicted, cannot look after the child, is neglectful, and doesn't have a place to live.” I mean, we know the answers: give her a place to live, etc. The question is, what are the things we can do that are concrete, that can get to the heart of this whole vicious cycle of apprehending children and of trapping women in violent situations with no way out?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I'll address the constitutional part of your question, and then I think perhaps Muriel is the best person to talk more specifically about those concrete solutions.

The federal government clearly has jurisdiction over aboriginal peoples. The provincial government has jurisdiction over children's services. I think the problem occurs when we see an intersection of those two issues. I don't think there would be anything stopping the federal government from passing a law that related to children's services for aboriginal peoples, but—

The Chair: And that would be constitutionally valid?

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: I think it would, if the law was seen as being aimed at aboriginal peoples and your jurisdiction there. I think that would be fine.

At the same time, though, I don't know that it's necessary to go to that stage of passing a specialized law. I think what's important is for there to be cooperation between the governments. We've heard a little bit about that in other venues this morning, but there have been instances where the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers have gotten together and developed common protocols and common policies to try to deal with issues like domestic violence and child sexual abuse.

I think the area of violence against aboriginal women is an area where there really is a need to have that sort of cross-jurisdictional response, so it's great that the federal government has this committee doing its work. But it needs to now be coordinated with provincial and municipal levels as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have just one quick follow-up on that, because that is a piece.... In health, in fact, we know that if you are off reserve you carry a card that allows you to access provincial health services readily even though you're off reserve. The local provincial health services will look after you. You're suggesting that there might be ways to work out those same protocols with children.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: Yes.

The Chair: Muriel, a concrete step...?

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: Well, I really believe that we have to take the preventative measures and reach, as we are at this moment... we have a program for young girls. I think the lack of programs has resulted in all of these bad statistics. I've said this: if you have no money, you have no rights. So I think the answer with regard to what can be done at the community level is to empower the women themselves and to work with the existing organizations to carry out their mandates.

It's not a complicated answer. We know this is not complicated, in the sense that if you give the resources to the people who can address the issues, things will happen.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have one minute left. I want to thank all of you for coming and presenting, and because we have one minute left, I'm going to divide that into 20 seconds and ask Sandra, Jennifer, and Muriel to each give me one thing you want to leave with this committee that for you is the most important priority.

In 20 seconds, Sandra.

Dr. Sandra Lambertus: I would say to promote wellness and empowerment and not focus so much on running from one disaster to another.

The Chair: Jennifer.

Prof. Jennifer Koshan: The voices of aboriginal women need to be heard, and they actually need to be accounted for when laws and policies are being developed.

The Chair: Muriel.

Ms. Muriel Stanley Venne: I want every parliamentarian and every leader—provincial, federal, and municipal—to be aware of and proclaim the injustice to aboriginal women.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank you again for coming and for being so frank with us.

I will entertain a motion to adjourn.

Hon. Anita Neville: So moved.

The Chair: Thank you, Anita.

This committee is now adjourned.

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