HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women

IWFA • NUMBER 007 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, June 6, 2013

Chair

Mrs. Stella Ambler

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● (1805)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC)): Welcome to meeting number seven of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women. I'd like to welcome our witnesses today and to apologize ahead of time if I mess up any pronunciations. I'd like to welcome our video conference guest first, if that works for you, Ms. Porteous.

Please begin. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Tracy Porteous (Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia): Thank you very much. My name is Tracy Porteous and I am the executive director of the Ending Violence Association of B.C.

This is a provincial non-profit NGO that works on behalf of 240 anti-violence programs in the province of B.C. What they all have in common is that they respond to sexual and domestic violence, child abuse, and criminal harassment. I have been working in the field of response to violence against women for 31 years.

I'm here not to speak for aboriginal women but more as an ally to them in what I've seen happen to aboriginal women during at least the three decades I've been working in the field. I've had the great privilege of working with many aboriginal women leaders for many years—chiefs; local, provincial, and national leaders and healers; academics; and lawyers—all in the context of ending violence against women, increasing safety, supporting families, and helping people and women move forward with their lives. I've also worked quite a lot with a lot of aboriginal women to look at policies with police and crown counsel and child protection.

There is no doubt that you are aware of the disproportionate levels of violence experienced by aboriginal women in Canada, so I will not go over any of those statistics with you today. You also probably know that in B.C. we have the most murdered and missing aboriginal women of anywhere in Canada, a profoundly troubling reality that we must move forward on.

I'm not going to take the time today to articulate the great volumes of research that have been created about what needs to be done on this subject. In fact I want to caution you about concluding these meetings with recommendations for more studies or more reports. Throughout the first decade of 2000, EVA BC—which is the short form for my organization—working in partnership with the Pacific Association of First Nation's Women, and BC Women's Hospital, held a number of meetings with aboriginal women across the province, all looking at and having discussions about the issue of violence against women, and what aboriginal women felt needed to be done.

We studied the issues very carefully over number of years and we produced two reports, the latter of which is called “Researched To Death”. I think that report alone speaks to what many of our aboriginal sisters believe today: that many governments are willing to fund studies and reports but very few are willing to stand up and fund and support the long-term infrastructural solutions to the problem at hand. In this case it's violence against aboriginal women and girls.

The three organizations concluded, based on the findings of all the reports we could put our hands on, that, alarmingly, aboriginal women experience the highest levels of violence of any women in Canada but to this day, in 2013, very little has been done.

We need programs designed by aboriginal women for aboriginal women, and we believe nothing short of those will do. In fact, across the province and in every territory in Canada right now there are networks of services that are there to respond to sexual and domestic violence. Not all jurisdictions have all the services they need, but all the provinces and territories have these services. They're mostly what I would call mainstream services; that is, services set up by non-aboriginal social services or women's groups.

While many of these services have aboriginal women on staff and many of them reach out to women on reserve, there are many women who live on reserve who can't make it to town or who choose not to go to a mainstream service who would feel more comfortable going to an appropriate culturally based service themselves.

I won't get into the history of colonization as to what might be behind that. There's also a population of aboriginal women who might want the security of going to a mainstream service, who might want to go to town for reasons of confidentiality or because of relations in the local community.

For this reason we believe that of all the things you might consider, there are two that you might consider, and one of them is to make sure the existing anti-violence services across the country have aboriginal women on staff, and that they have appropriate cross-cultural competency training so that they can provide an appropriate respectful response to aboriginal women seeking a service who have been victims of violence.

● (1810)

In addition to adding onto the existing services, we believe there should be a service co-connected to reserves and friendship centres that is run by aboriginal women for aboriginal women in every one of these communities. I believe, after 31 years of working in the field, this is probably one of the most significant things that could be done. This is something that's been done for the last 30 years for non-aboriginal mainstream women: the process of breaking the multi-generational cycle of violence.

Everyone needs help; nobody can do it by themselves. The roots and causes and current attachments and harmful ways that we survivors can think about ourselves all need to be unravelled. One needs a counsellor to help create the new internal foundations and the new internal world frameworks.

This is how self-esteem and empowerment are created. This is how women get to the place where they say, “I've had enough of this violence. I don't deserve what's happening to me. I'm going to make this stop. I'm not going to put up with it any more.”

As for the supports and services that have been put in place by the mainstream, while violence is still at epidemic levels, at least those mainstream women have had those supports, and aboriginal women have made it to those services.

There are many anti-violence workers doing this work. They've existed, as I said, for many years—20, 30, sometimes 35 years for many of them. If you are considering funding aboriginal women's services to exist in a collocated perspective, on reserve or in friendship centres, an enormous sisterhood can be tapped into. We don't need to have services created from scratch. There's a whole 35-year history of the provision of advocacy and empowerment services that anti-violence feminists have created.

Obviously a cultural translation would need to take place. These services aren't for aboriginal women; if you're setting up services by aboriginal women, for aboriginal women, at least some sharing of knowledge could take place. In B.C. alone we have 202 distinct first nations communities with distinct cultural practices that would need to be respected.

As well, aboriginal women, more than other mainstream women, have made it very clear for the last 25 years of us working together in B.C. that any response needs to be more holistic. It can't just be for aboriginal women. It needs to be for men and youth as well.

If we get time a little bit later, I'd like to tell you the story of the development of Canada's first and only sexual assault centre for women, called The Women of Our People, which I had the privilege of helping start on Vancouver Island many years ago.

I think the solutions we need will only come with aboriginal women being at the centre. We need to empower them, I believe, and provide them with the resources to heal their communities.

I won't take up time today talking about the need to change systems, because I'm sure that has formed the basis of a lot of your conversation. I will say, though, that racism is still an active toxin in our society. It remains as a deadly ingredient, responsible for much of the inaction that I think we're all facing right now.

I think we stand on a legacy of violence and racism left by colonization and residential schools, but that's not in the past: those attitudes exist today. I can testify, as a front-line worker and as an advocate for over three decades, that I can still see my first nations sisters being treated differently and being treated with less respect than they deserve.

Each system, therefore, also needs cultural competency training. We must attend to that.

We also need transparency from our systems. We need our systems, including the police and prosecutors, to document who they're providing responses to. I know that at least in the province of B.C. the RCMP does not make a note of who the victims or who the offenders are in terms of race, ethnicity, or cultural heritage. If we don't know who we're providing services to, we don't know who's not getting served.

The attachment and the connection and the release of statistics is something that's all been lost, at least in the province of B.C. I think we need to have that information if we're going to be developing appropriate and useful public policy.

If I have time later and you'd like to ask me about some research we're doing on women who are victims of domestic violence and who are being arrested by the police, I'd be very happy to talk to you about that. It relates to statistics, cultural heritage, and being able to figure out how people are being disproportionately provided with service.

● (1815)

I want to touch on a concept that we believe is possibly a great idea and best practice. The concept we have arrived at is the idea that the demographic of most anti-violence programs across the country is largely non-aboriginal. With regard to these services that I talked about a bit earlier—these mainstream, largely women's, services that are responding to sexual and domestic violence—though many of them have aboriginal women on staff, they need to have more of them on staff.

We would like to suggest that you support the development of a college and/or a university diploma course that would train violence against women workers. George Brown College has something like this in Toronto, but it doesn't exist anywhere else in Canada.

We believe that in a very short time, from the development of this diploma course—

The Chair: Ms. Porteous, I'm sorry to interrupt.

Could I just ask you to wrap up as quickly as you can? The 10 minutes was up a while ago.

Ms. Tracy Porteous: Okay. I'll just finish up on this diploma course.

We believe that by having a diploma course and starting to see graduates, we could create within a short period of time substantially more diverse anti-violence programs. We could increase the employment opportunities for aboriginal women. We could increase the capacity of aboriginal communities to respond to violence against aboriginal women. We could attend to the crisis of recruitment of workers into social service agencies across rural parts of Canada and attend to the issue of there being very little money for post-employment training.

There is lots more I could say, but I've used up my 10 minutes, so I'll end there.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Porteous. We really appreciate that.

Welcome, Rolanda Manitowabi. Thank you for being here.

A few of us were at the status of women committee when you appeared there as well, so we're doubly grateful that you would come back today.

Welcome. You have 10 minutes as well.

Ms. Rolanda Manitowabi (Executive Director, Ngwaagan Gamig Recovery Centre Inc.): Again, my name is Rolanda Manitowabi. I'm from the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island.

I believe this invitation stems from the MRP issues and the testimony that I gave as an individual. Still as an individual, I will share a bit about my work experience and my personal experience as related to violence against aboriginal women.

The cycle of abuse, in my experience and my perception, is insidious, and the impacts complex, and it takes much time to unravel the connections and outcomes. Personally, I have experienced abuse in childhood and in adulthood and have been working for many years towards being safe and out of fear.

I have found comfort, understanding, and validation through people who have understood and listened, such as counsellors, and in programs that I've attended, in healing ceremonies, and through helping in the field of domestic violence as well as helping to raise awareness about the impacts of residential schools, and more recently in my current work in the field of addictions.

Although physical abuse was stopped by my running away in the late 1980s, I found myself later re-emerging in the cycle again, in a relationship that was emotionally, mentally, and spiritually abusive. While trying to strengthen my understanding of cultural teachings, I was being isolated and drained emotionally and financially. My son and I were thrown out of our home in January of 2007, a home that I had financed. I found help through the women's shelter on Manitoulin Island—not on the reserve, but on the island—which provided shelter to us first and then counselling for quite a long time. Through my family members as well, I found support.

I've struggled with the impacts of that displacement as well as prior incidents of hypocrisy in cultural and societal practices. My son has much to deal with as well, but that's for him to share.

As a mother, I am angered and hurt but have come to a time of feeling much more peace, safety, and compassion. It has been a gift to have survived through troubled times to actually enjoy life. By sharing more, I hope we can help others.

I filed a civil case two years after I was thrown out of my home. It was challenging to keep a lawyer, though I did find one a few months after I filed the claim. I wanted to file a civil suit so that I could get back some of the money I had contributed to the construction of the home. For me, it was a stepping forward, for the first time for myself. The ups and downs, the stalling, and the delays were very stressful. Only a year ago, as we started the fiasco of a civil trial, I settled during court.

I look back on the events and impacts now with more understanding of this whole issue of violence. For me, it was or is so ingrained in my life that there are connections to prior impacts of abuse. We talk about the values of respect, kindness, and honouring women, but we don't show it, and I suspect that we really don't believe it. I'm learning to honour myself, and it feels good. It feels new.

Supports to help me take care of myself have been my only way of reaching deeper into my own history and trauma and into greater healing. It's kind of sad that at 48 years old I've only come to realize this. I'm grateful for the feelings of self-worth and for perhaps some things to share.

My work in addictions is in management; however, I am briefed with client progress, the review of applications, and histories of substance abuse and trauma. I'm blessed to see remarkable change through the empowerment of the programs offered. Many others I'm sure had the same effect; however, the sustainability to support that uncovered spirit for many of our women is really needed in individuals, families, and communities.

Support can include programs to build self-esteem and confidence, to increase personal safety, and to enhance understanding of the issues for police and judges. It can include programming resources, not only for shelters, PAR programs, and such for those who have been assaultive or abusive, but also for programs to educate children on what is gender-based violence, on what is healthy relationship-building, and on building role models for kindness, caring, empathy, and life skills. We need to learn to take care of our emotions and to take care of that empowerment.

That's all I have to share right now.

Thank you.

● (1820)

The Chair: Thank you, Rolanda. I appreciate that.

Ms. O'Hearn, we thank you as well for being here. We're very anxious to hear what you have to say so that you can inform our study on this very important issue.

You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn (Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada): Thank you. It's a great pleasure being here, and my colleague Katharine Irngaut is here with me as well. She manages our violence and abuse prevention department.

It's wonderful to see friends here. Mr. Saganash, it's a great pleasure to have you here as the representative for Nunavik. You'll know exactly what we're talking about. *Unnusakkut*.

We bring greetings, first of all, from our president, Rebecca Kudloo. She lives in Baker Lake, and she's on her way to Norway now for a preparatory meeting for the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. We bring her greetings, and she is very grateful to see what we hope will be some substantive work on the issue.

Pauktuutit has been the national representative organization of Inuit women for nearly 30 years. This is our 30th anniversary year. Since that time, violence against women, including child sexual abuse, has been and continues to be a priority.

Over the last couple of years, with more attention being paid to the issue in Canada, our board of directors has had very specific and detailed discussions about potential national initiatives. We want to tell you first about the different circumstances and priorities of Inuit women. Their culture, their language, and the geography of their communities are unique. They live largely in 53 communities across the Arctic. They're all isolated. They all fly in and fly out. There's very limited infrastructure, as we've heard someone mention before. There may or may not be a social worker, any sort of a health intervention worker, and more than 70% of these communities do not have a safe shelter for women and children. In Nunavik, for example, there are 14 northern villages, as they are called in Nunavik. There are three shelters, and they're not enough.

We've heard stories of women who have died because their requests to a social worker to be taken out of their community was denied. We've heard stories of women and children who have died as a direct result of overcrowding of shelters. This is in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut.

Within this context, initially our board of directors discussed a potential national task force in the context of their lives. At that point, they felt they did not want to support a national initiative but more specifically the human and financial resources that would be required when there are such critical emergency situations in the communities. However, they welcomed the creation of this committee and hope to be a key ally and key informant for you.

As was mentioned before, many socio-economic issues have to be addressed: overcrowded and inadequate housing, low educational attainment, poverty, food insecurity, high rates of unemployment, and very high rates of child sexual abuse.

One of Pauktuutit's priorities is to address the fact that violence happens along a continuum, across the lifespan. We would never diminish the significant work done by NWAC, but Inuit women's priorities are very different from the Highway of Tears, the tragedy in Vancouver. So this is extremely important to us. Within your work, the scope, and the mandate of what you're taking on, we request that our priorities be considered separately and specifically, and that any recommendations also be separate and specific.

I appreciate that we're short of time. I'm going to let Kat talk about a couple of new and emerging issues. We didn't come prepared with a formal presentation; we didn't come with pages of statistics, but they are certainly readily available. Again, another study was released only yesterday that documented the link between the childhood experiences of people who committed suicide and childhood sexual abuse. We need more evidence, but a lot is available.

I'll turn it over to Kat, and then we would welcome your questions.

Thank you.

● (1825)

Ms. Katharine Irngaut (Manager, Abuse Prevention, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada): Thank you.

The Chair: I want to let you know that you have more than five minutes, so take your time.

Ms. Katharine Irngaut: Thank you.

As Tracy mentioned, Inuit women face many different types and levels of violence and abuse. They may face emotional, mental, and/or physical abuse such as child sexual abuse, elder abuse, family violence, and, one of our newest emerging problems, human trafficking.

We know that sexual exploitation is present in mining and resource extraction projects around the world. We're not sure yet of what's happening in our communities.

We've heard anecdotally of 42 Inuit women who have been trafficked through Ottawa in the last four years. Trafficking routes include transit across the Arctic, across the east coast of Canada, as well as to Las Vegas and Miami. There are foreseeable problems still to come, including international issues that directly affect Inuit women.

The first is another wave of colonization, with the opening of the Northwest Passage and international influences on Arctic sovereignty. Another topic that ITK is more involved in is the EU seal ban that threatens the livelihood of all Inuit. These are major international issues that directly affect Inuit. We need to be part of that discussion.

Tracy talked also about the great work that NWAC is doing and has done.

We have our own types of organizations that are first nation, Métis, and Inuit, or population-specific. “Aboriginal” is a term of a grouping that's used quite often, but often Inuit voices get lost with that type of address, so we would prefer using the terms “first nation”, “Métis”, and “Inuit”, over “aboriginal” or “indigenous”, in the language going forward.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: We participate at many levels. We work with the provinces and territories on a subcommittee of the aboriginal affairs working group. We participated last November in the National Aboriginal Women's Summit III and collaboratively developed a number of recommendations. One in particular is that there must be the capacity for representative organizations to participate as equals. We're here. We have the expertise. We just need the capacity to participate.

We put forward a recommendation about the creation of an ombudsman to oversee law enforcement and justice workers, and to report to the public about issues and concerns related to racism and other systemic issues. There's an urgent need to raise awareness among Inuit: family violence continues to be the most significant issue in Inuit communities.

We do need research. I know in many areas there has been a tremendous amount of work done, but we need more Inuit-specific research.

As Kat was saying, human trafficking is an emerging issue that is really frightening to us.

We would be more than happy to provide a written submission. Just with the time of year and the life of a not-for-profit organization, we haven't been able to do it yet. This is absolutely a priority for us.

We very much appreciate your time. Thank you.

● (1830)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll be more than happy to take that written submission when you have time to prepare it. We'll look forward to receiving that. Thank you.

Just to let you know, you might see that we have some hungry parliamentarians. While we're eating—I hope you don't mind if we do that—the clerk has also generously ordered some sandwiches in as well, so please feel free, everyone in the room, as you arrive, to take a little break as well if you'd like to have a bite to eat.

All right. We'll now begin our rounds of seven minutes with Ms. Davies.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much.

I'll be splitting my time with Ms. Ashton.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for coming here today. This committee has just started, so we're really just getting into the program and understanding what's going on. That said, many of us have worked in these areas and have participated in other committees, so we do have a background and a familiarity with the issues that we're looking at here.

As Tracy said at the beginning and as we've heard from many people, there have certainly been many reports and recommendations on this issue. So how do we actually get to solutions, how do we actually get to helping communities that are in distress, and how do we actually get to helping women who are facing violence in the aboriginal community?

We've had a number of witnesses from government departments. Our first couple of meetings were with government departments here in Ottawa.

One question I have for all of you, because I think you're very familiar with the scene, is how aware do you think aboriginal communities, particularly organizations that service women, are of federal programs, and how effective are they? Do you see big gaps in service?

We've been told that safety plans exist and programs against violence against women, but it's hard to actually know how effective they are. Certainly the voice of the community in that regard is very important, so if any of you have any insight on how you see those programs working, or not working, and what is effective and what isn't, I think it would be very helpful to us.

Would any of you like to comment on that? Perhaps you would keep your comments short, because my colleague, Ms. Ashton, is also going to ask a question.

Ms. Tracy Porteous: It's Tracy here, from Vancouver.

I certainly have a response, if I'm still on.

Ms. Libby Davies: Go ahead.

Ms. Tracy Porteous: Okay, thank you.

We have a project going on that's being coordinated by Beverley Jacobs, who used to be with NWAC a number of years ago. She is trained as a lawyer and is going around the province engaging the leadership of aboriginal communities—the governance, chief and council, band social workers, and so forth, and also friendship centre staff—training them and sharing knowledge to ensure that they know enough about domestic and sexual violence to respond to an initial disclosure. As you said, a lot of people say there are anti-violence services, but they don't exist in every small community and every reserve and every village. We want to make sure that these leaders have the confidence to know how to respond, and know what policies should be in place in case aboriginal women are not being treated properly.

What we're finding is that there is a massive disconnect, especially in remote communities, but even in communities that are not that remote. Even in the communities along the Highway of Tears that have suffered the terrible tragedies of missing and murdered women, which may be located only 45 minutes outside of Prince George, or Smithers, or Prince Rupert, there is a huge disconnect between them and the mainstream programs that exist for responding to violence against women.

There is also an amazing amount of energy and willingness to be involved in a coordinated perspective. Beverley is working with the communities on an individual basis, working through some of these issues doing training and knowledge-sharing, and then ending up with the development of a safety plan.

She is talking to communities and asking, “Okay, if you are a remote community, what are you going to do the next time a woman wants to call 911 because she's been beaten up, and the RCMP are 45 minutes away? What are you, as a community, going to do to deal with this?”

But you are absolutely right, there are a number of safety planning, risk assessment, and violence counselling response services available, but they need to be more on-the-ground and closer to aboriginal communities.

● (1835)

Ms. Libby Davies: Thank you very much.

How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have two minutes and 40 seconds.

Ms. Libby Davies: Overall, I have seven minutes?

Okay, I will turn it over to Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you very much, Ms. Davies.

Thank you to our colleagues. I want to particularly thank the Inuit women who have come forward with a very distinct story here.

I am a once-over neighbour of Romeo Saganash, representing Churchill, which is obviously a community a hub for many Inuit people. I was involved with a women's shelter in my hometown of Thompson, where many Inuit women actually came to seek refuge.

Clearly, this is a national epidemic of missing and murdered first nations, Métis, and Inuit women. There have been many calls for a national inquiry and I wonder what you would say to those calls, or how you view that call?

Perhaps we could start with Ms. O'Hearn.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: Thank you.

I mentioned that our board initially thought that any resources required or devoted to such an undertaking could really be better spent on an emergency basis in Inuit communities. They felt that if they had a choice, that would be their preference. More than 70% of women don't have a shelter, and women die as a direct result. But if it does goes forward, it's critically important to them that Inuit be consulted separately and specifically, that their true voices and priorities be heard, and then reflected in any resulting recommendations. A lot of work has been done. We know what's required; we just have to do it.

I'd like to, if I may, respond briefly to Ms. Davies's questions about funding. I can give you a very specific response. For nearly 30 years Pauktuutit worked with the Department of Canadian Heritage, developing projects under their aboriginal women's program. One stream looked at family violence, one stream looked at self-government, and I'm forgetting the third. For the first time in nearly 30 years we are not working with Canadian Heritage; the funding criteria have been changed. It now has a community focus.

Pauktuutit's role was to fill the gaps in the communities, because there just isn't the capacity in most communities to have organized women's groups writing proposals, incorporating, and receiving funding, and undertaking a project. That's where Pauktuutit has come in and played a significant role in developing resources—bilingual, plain language, or whatever—that have been of use to all the communities. We met with them several times and tried to find a potential solution. It simply was not possible. That's just as of this fiscal year.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Rickford for seven minutes.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'll make a couple of quick comments about some of the content of the presentations and then probably focus some of my questions to Rolanda. Just indulge me for about a moment.

First of all, Katharine, thank you for your references to human trafficking, the Northwest Passage, and the seal hunt. I am struck by at least two of those not having occurred to me in the context of some of what we will no doubt continue to build on in this conversation. I will probably reach out in a more private meeting to get more information from that. I know that the committee would benefit from some of that information.

It has been my observation, and unfortunately my experience, having worked as a nurse in isolated and remote communities across the northern provinces, including the Arctic, that there are indeed complexities here, as you mentioned, Rolanda, which hopefully, over the course of time, this committee— which I think is the most appropriate forum to address many of these issues—will consider.

Specifically, Rolanda, to your presentation, I have seen first-hand that not only is there an existing vulnerability in many of the communities, particularly in isolated, remote communities, and that there may be some resources, including shelters—although there's a host of reasons why shelters don't go in communities.... There are political and difficult issues to work through, no matter what side of the debate we might be on, but importantly, in addition to that, it gives rise to a certain vulnerability, as you referred to, and to running away from the community.

I think that pretty consistently there is a correlation between a problem or a situation that arising from domestic violence on reserve or in a community that leads to that girl or woman leaving for a city, confronting a whole host of different new realities, and falling vulnerable prey to some very dangerous conditions.

There are two things on my mind, Rolanda. If time permits, the others can chime in on this.

First of all, with respect to the matrimonial real property regime, I believe that the most important part of that is the protection order and priority occupations, because I do believe that there has been a shortfall in raising awareness in a variety of different ways on reserve, particularly in the isolated communities, to make it clear what the law could potentially do in these exigent circumstances. That's the regime itself and what it provides. There are other things in the dissolution of the marriage, but I'm focused on those two components.

The second thing is program outreach. I believe that over the course of time, no matter how good the intentions of NWAC, Status of Women, or other programs have been, they have failed to target the awareness to the appropriate people to some degree—to some degree—and that has been with children in schools, and particularly the males in those communities, around not just respect, but actually violence itself. We have funded these de-escalation programs in cities such as Kenora, where we have managed to influence and impact and have participation from surrounding communities, but we haven't gotten to where we'd like to be or where we should be in isolated communities.

Rolanda, more pointedly, my rambling notwithstanding, can you comment on the regime itself and what is particularly of importance and benefit to you, based on your experience? Comment, then, if you could, on what benefits MRP regimes provide to raising awareness in communities, if there are any, and what additional kinds of activities we could do on reserve to raise more awareness in what I believe is a target group that we should be focusing on.

● (1840)

Ms. Rolanda Manitowabi: I'll try to do my best with that. First, I want to clarify that when I was 12 years old, I took the opportunity of going to a boarding school. So in effect I was running away from home then. I did run back home from the city after school. I just returned to my community in 1998 only to find that, of course, the violence and abuse were still there. I say that just for clarification.

I think that when I experienced being thrown out of my home with my son.... I work in the community. I know the resources. I worked at social services. I'm in the addictions field. But it was such a crisis that you don't think readily or clearly. Outreach would have been helpful. I think I had one or two people out of the entire community ask me what really happened. Again, it was like a silent crisis for years.

You can have safety plans. I think safety plans keep you physically alive. But you don't feel safe for a long time until you do the work of making sure that all precautions are taken. You then start to build on that experience of feeling safe. Nonetheless, that sense of safety still isn't there; I still feel unsafe at times because I run into certain individuals, and continue to deal with obscene gestures and remarks and those sorts of things.

They were helpful to me at the shelter. God bless them. They're so busy and so alert 24/7 in dealing with crises. I'm so glad that they were there for me when I needed them. But I knew about them. So I'm not so sure if any person going through a crisis would readily think of those things. I think the outreach is absolutely needed and some type of coordination team or something like that when situations happen. People knew that happened to me; they knew that when I was thrown out of the house and the door was locked, nobody came. I tried calling and all sorts of stuff. The police said their hands were tied.

People know what's happening but they don't know how to deal with it. It's as if we live in a community that's paralyzed, because we're in crisis and we deal with a lot of issues all the time. Sometimes things are normalized.

● (1845)

The Chair: Thank you.

Sorry, I know time goes by quickly.

We'll move over to you, Ms. Bennett, for seven minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thanks very much.

First, Tracy and Katharine, I would like to know a little more about the need for Inuit specific research and approaches. Could you describe to the committee the link between childhood sexual abuse and addiction, the link between childhood sexual abuse and leaving a community, leaving a family? I don't know whether you have any experience with that. What we've heard more recently, which I hadn't thought of, was about children fleeing abusive foster care. That seems to be under-reported.

I wonder if you would also tell us about your experience—maybe Tracy in B.C., as well—with there not being enough shelters and also the invisibility of the existing ones. In downtown Toronto, for example, the shelters are invisible. No one knows about them. There's no sign on the front. Nobody can find out where they are. I've been to the one in Apex in Iqaluit and everybody knows where the shelter is, and if someone wants to come after somebody who has been so bold as to leave the household and embarrass him, that person knows where to find her.

The solutions are different. Obviously, there are not enough shelters. But even ensuring safety in the shelters is more difficult in remote and rural communities.

I wondered what research you think still needs to be done. What would be your suggestions? I had many patients who ended up addicted because they were numbing themselves from being daddy's or uncle's little girl. That was the way they dealt with that, and then they ended up more likely to be addicted, a street worker, whatever. It was part of the numbing out that needed to happen for lack of treatment.

Can you tell me where you are in the research, and where you'd like to go?

Ms. Katharine Irngaut: First, I'd like to say that Statistics Canada used to have an aboriginal liaison program for national aboriginal organizations. I'm not sure what level it's now at in terms of their personnel, but they would have a statistician assigned or available to national aboriginal organizations to help run data for us. I'm not sure if that program is still up and running. Having specific statistics run is challenging.

I think another thing that's challenging is that not everyone self-identifies, so there are not a lot of ethnic identity questions. We often get aboriginal statistics that are all grouped together and that aren't specific for first nations, Métis, and Inuit, so we wouldn't know that.

A lot of the work we do gauges the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours in the communities. When we do projects, we are convening an advisory committee to give us the best, on-the-ground knowledge they have that's specific to their needs and what they see every day.

There is only a one-time offer to be medevaced out of a community, if you're fleeing violence. As we know, someone fleeing a violent household could try to do so up to 19 tries. It has to be perfectly timed, which can be a big issue if there's not a safe shelter or safe housing available.

I don't know if I can illustrate this enough, but there's no physical building. There's no private housing market. You don't go home if there's no place for that type of shelter.

● (1850)

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: If I may, I'd like to follow up more specifically on child sexual abuse.

Each of the four Arctic regions has now completed an Inuit health survey, which included household questions and also experiences of childhood sexual abuse.

In the one in Nunavik, we know that 44% of respondents identified that they have been the victim of unwanted sexual interference as a minor—44%—but I'm not aware of further, more specific research. Starting to get those numbers was a big step.

Then yesterday this new study was released, from McGill, I believe, trying to look more substantively at the links. As I said, 15% of the group they studied who had committed suicide had previously been sexually abused.

We also need to know a lot more about the experience of women when they come south, because they do flee the communities for safety, absolutely. They come here and it's a different culture: the language, the food, everything is different. They may or may not have contemporary survival skills in a completely different world. Twenty per cent of Inuit are living in the south now. We have to know more about the experiences of women, the barriers the face, if we are to come up with some solutions.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think we must have those stats. At Women's Own Detox in Toronto, I think 110% of the clients have suffered previous sexual abuse, and I think it's been under-reported.

So thank you for that.

I forgot to mention, Madam Chair, that we seem again not to be televised.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds. Did you want to use your 30 seconds to talk about this issue?

We can't televise and have a video conference in this room. If we want a televised meeting and video conference, we have to go to 1 Wellington. We can certainly do that, and that's fine.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think that was a priority that we set as a committee. It's up to the clerk to find a room where we can do both.

The Chair: Right. We did say that we would—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I would hope that, as a precedent, that we could have one minute of silence for the people who have gone missing since our last meeting, particularly the 17-year-old who's missing in Scarborough right now, Melissa's daughter, in the Anwhatin family. We need to put a very personal face on the work we're doing here.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Ms. Bennett.

As for the television, as I say, when we have a—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We can hear about that during committee business, but yet again we had a consensus at this committee that it would be televised. It's an unusual time to have a committee, and it's very important that people be able to hear the—

The Chair: We do have some time for committee business afterwards, so let's have that decision at that time.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Okay, and can we have the minute of silence before we break this evening, please?

The Chair: Certainly, if that's the will of the committee.

Yes, a point of order.

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): We didn't have a consensus that everything be televised. We had a consensus to be flexible, because on your point, you said that some people would be too embarrassed to have it televised. So if it's on an ad hoc basis, I'm okay with the television thing.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I'm sorry, but it's up to the clerk to find out about the sensitivity of any witness, and we understood that the default position was that these meetings would be televised.

Mr. Robert Goguen: I don't think that's correct, but that's fine.

The Chair: I'd like to deal with this under committee business, so we can get on to the witnesses.

● (1855)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Could you send us the research, unless someone else will ask the question about the research on the link between previous abuse and being arrested by the police.

The Chair: If you have a report to send us, Ms. Porteous, we'd be happy to accept that, as per Ms. Bennett's request.

We'll move over to you, Ms. Block, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I will be sharing my time with Ms. Rempel.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today, and Ms. Porteous for joining us through video conference.

As one of our colleagues has already noted, we are in the early days of this study, and we have heard from a few witnesses already, many of whom I would suggest at this time are experts. But here I want to make special note of Rolanda, who I think is probably an expert in a class of people who have experienced violence and being thrown out of her home. I think stories are often far more compelling than we know, and so I want to thank you for being here and for sharing your story and your experience.

Ms. Porteous, in your opening remarks you made note of some of the suggestions you would make as a result of the work we are doing as a committee. You suggested that we needed to use current services and ensure that aboriginal women are on staff in those current services, that there should be cultural sensitivity training, and that these services should be collocated on reserves or in friendship centres whenever possible. I'm wondering if you would mind expanding a little on how you see us building that capacity to do that.

Ms. Tracy Porteous: I'd be happy to do that. What I was saying is that I think there are two things that need to happen.

There's an existing infrastructure of strength across the country in anti-violence programs. In B.C., they come in the form of community-based victim assistance programs, sexual assault centres, women assault centres, and shelters. There are about 400 of those programs in the province of B.C. itself. In fact, there are 240 under our umbrella alone. In Ontario, I think it's more of a shelter network, but there are sexual assault centres in most of the other provinces. I believe we need to ensure that all of those services are providing, as best as possible, culturally competent and accessible services to aboriginal women.

As well, in addition to that, so that there are many gateways and not just one solution, there should be services run by aboriginal women and for aboriginal women on reserve and through the friendship centres. That's so it's not just one solution, because some women who live in small communities might want to leave and go to town, and there are other women who for many reasons can't, or don't want to, or don't trust mainstream services.

I want to speak for just one second on your question. It also leads into the discussion that was just happening around shelters and someone leaving or somebody knowing or not knowing where the shelter is.

I think of the importance of having a continuum of services. That includes shelters for those women who want to leave, who need to leave, and who need to get to a safe place, which usually involves leaving the community for a short period of time, but the more complicated and more difficult work is in working with women who choose to stay in abusive relationships. This is one of the ways in which women who experience violence are often re-victimized by the system, because police, social workers and prosecutors.... As one of my sisters said, you only get one chance to be medevaced out. What about the other 18 times that a woman leaves? Some studies say it's 35 times before a woman actually leaves.

I think most women will say that they want the violence to stop, but they don't want the relationship to end, so the solution isn't always about getting her to leave. Now, in many circumstances that needs to be the case, and there need to be appropriate professionals, adequately trained people, to be able to assess lethal risk. We need to know the difference between those women who might be killed and those women where there has been a circumstance such that she needs to leave and there needs to be a cool-down period, but she wants to go back to him, for a myriad of reasons.

● (1900)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

I'll turn it over to Michelle.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Rolanda, I was very struck by your testimony and the impact your situation had on you and your family.

In my brief time, I'll ask you a very pointed question. Do you feel that your situation could have been avoided if the matrimonial real property rights position the government has taken had been in effect at the time?

Ms. Rolanda Manitowabi: Yes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: For the other witnesses who are here, I'm on this committee because I feel it's a very important issue to be addressed by Parliament through a parliamentary committee. I'd just like to get your opinion on whether or not you agree with that statement. Do you feel this committee is important to that happening?

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: Would our sister in B.C. like to go ahead?

My mike is on, so I would say yes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Great. Thank you.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: I don't want to sound like a broken record, but with a clearly defined and sufficiently broad scope, mandate, and inclusion of Inuit women, yes.

Thank you.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: I have 10 seconds left, and Katharine, your statement on human trafficking was quite impactful as well. Are you aware of some of the changes we have made to human trafficking laws in Canada over the last year?

How has that impacted some of the issues you've just raised? Are there any gaps that we still need to address from a legislative perspective?

Ms. Katharine Irngaut: I think Pauktuutit is known for addressing very sensitive issues in a culturally relevant, holistic fashion. We use a gendered lens. We use trauma-informed practices. We don't go out with anything public until we're sure that we have services or at least some sort of protective measures in place.

For the new legislation around HT, the update last July, I think it's amazing that Canada has done a tighter legislative process than the UN for human trafficking. It's now getting the ramifications of what that means to the front-line workers and the justice workers to have it translated into Inuktitut. The Criminal Code is not translated into Inuktitut. We need to have plain-language understanding.

There haven't been any charges yet in Inuit communities, yet we know it's happening.

Thank you.

The Chair: Perfect timing. Thank you very much.

Over to you, Ms. Crowder, for five minutes.

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

I'm going to split my time with Mr. Saganash, who's going to start.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): First of all, thank you to all the witnesses for your contribution to the work of this committee.

I want to address very quickly some of the points you raised, Tracy. You talked about how the term “aboriginal peoples” sort of buries “Inuit” in that expression. I agree with that. I also certainly can appreciate your comments about the Inuit being in a specific context, therefore requiring a specific approach. I agree with that as well.

The comment about development and what development will bring up north is also an important one. I still recall how in the early seventies, when the James Bay development came into our Cree territory, one of the first incidents that happened during that time was the rape and murder of two 15-year-old Cree girls by Hydro-Québec workers. So your concerns that you foresee in that respect are important to remember.

I have a quick question about the need for a national inquiry. I understand that the priority for the Inuit, because of their specific context, is the need for shelters. I clearly understand that. I've travelled to most of the Inuit communities in Nunavik, and they raise that issue a lot. But does that priority prevent the government from establishing a national inquiry or even starting work on a national plan of action to eliminate violence against women?

● (1905)

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: No, it wouldn't stop such a process. Shelters are a critical need, but they're not even a band-aid on the solution. They're a way to save lives, hopefully, but they're far from the response that's required.

With regard to shelters, the federal government does provide some funding specifically for shelters, but on-reserve only. Inuit communities are specifically excluded from accessing federal funding for shelters. The federal government says it's the responsibility of the provinces and territories. The provinces and territories say, oh, I'm sorry, there's no money.

Certainly in Nunavut they're struggling with so many social issues—the lack of housing, the cost of health care—and we don't want to be adversarial with anyone who will be a partner with us, but no one really is taking responsibility for meeting that emergency need.

Ms. Jean Crowder: You can hear from the testimony we've heard in this last hour that this is such a complicated issue. One of the mandates this committee has outlined, in the motion that was presented to us, was that we were to propose solutions to address the root causes of violence.

We don't have time to do that in this format today, but if you have specific solutions or recommendations that this committee might want to consider in dealing with the root causes of violence, perhaps I could ask you to send those to the clerk, along with the names of any specific people you think we need to talk to—people who have lived the experience, or people who are working in the field who could make specific suggestions.

I know that Ms. Porteous talked about Bev Jacobs. I think it would be incumbent on this committee to hear from Bev Jacobs, given some of the work she's doing in British Columbia. I'm sure in your life experience and in your professional life you know people who could come and help us, and give us some advice.

In whatever time I have left, perhaps someone has a specific suggestion that they'd like to the committee to go away with tonight. It doesn't have to be a solution, but just something that we want to go forward on.

Ms. Irngaut.

Ms. Katharine Irngaut: We recently had a community story project, a residential school project that we conducted in Kugaaruk, Nunavut. One of the things we based it on was that we build resilience through expression through art and culture. We heal through expressing ourselves in different ways.

What I've taken away from that particular experience is that people are far more likely to be involved if it's fun, even if it's a difficult topic. Healing can be very painful, but helping each other should be a fun activity.

So anything we try to do is done through a lens of building resilience and also of healing through levity. It's one of the only ways that we survive—and continue to do our work every day, too.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saganash.

Now we'll go to Ms. Truppe for five minutes.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you as well, Rolanda, for coming to this committee to share your personal experience.

Tracy and Katharine, I want to find out about some of the funding you've received from Status of Women and Aboriginal Affairs. Maybe you can elaborate on what it did, and how it helped maybe prevent violence against women and girls, or what the teaching is doing.

I think you received $80,000, jointly between Aboriginal Affairs and Status of Women to promote entrepreneurship. I think $40,000 went to GBA, and $100,000 went to economic self-sufficiency of Inuit women. Then almost $300,000 was for reduction of family violence in Inuit communities.

How did all or any of those help young girls or women so that they're maybe not in a violent situation?

● (1910)

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: Thank you.

We have had long and strong working relationships with a number of departments. One of the keys to our expertise is very close relations with people in the communities who tell us what's needed. There's a great need for plain language information in English and more than one dialect of Inuktitut. I mentioned earlier that we try to fill in the gaps in communities by developing resources that everyone can use.

As for the workshop in Kugaaruk that Kat was talking about, we've come out with a workshop model that any community can use if they want to use that approach, which is one of bringing adult survivors of residential schools together with youth. In this case they worked with a remarkable group called BluePrintForLife. They use hip hop as a form of healing.

I think that's a very good example of how we can take a fairly modest investment and maximize the output. There are copies of it and we have it online, including things to think about and the resources that you need. You might need some money. We've done that with Status of Women projects as well. I think we've developed a unique on-the-land healing model for women, tested in Tuktoyaktuk, Nunavik, and Iqaluit. Again, it was very successful.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Could anything have been changed in those projects? Did they work really well, or could anything have been improved in them?

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: I can speak specifically about an economic development project that we just completed. We worked with AANDC primarily—and Status of Women did want to partner with us because they thought it was very important. We wanted to develop a model that could be used in other regions.

What did women who are already in business need? If it was more about information; I heard that someone, for example wanted to know more about what her responsibilities were as an employer. There's a lack of accounting services in the north. We've put together specific information. Who are the funding bodies in Nunavut? How can you access them? How can you get some capital?

We intended to develop a model, and as people became aware of the project, about six months into the last fiscal year we had 70 members across the country asking for information and support that we weren't ready to provide. We're hoping to renew discussions with the federal government to sustain what is already so successful in Nunavut and to bring it to the other regions. I think that is why we ask: what do you need, how can we help you? I think we develop very useful information.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Ms. Porteous, as I tell everybody in my city of London, Ontario, my favourite project is Be More Than a Bystander. I love that program. I thought it was one of the best funded programs I've heard of because it engages men and boys and involves the B.C. Lions.

Can you explain how that is helping to maybe prevent violence against women and girls—and I say “girls”, I guess, because they're going to high schools in that area.

Ms. Tracy Porteous: This is another opportunity to talk about the last question as well, in terms of the root causes of violence against women. One of the many root causes is how we socialize men and women and boys and girls.

This program, “Be More Than a Bystander: Break the Silence on Violence Against Women”, has B.C. Lions football players speaking to young men in high schools across the province. They're also doing public service announcements for us on T.V. and radio to try to get the vast majority of men who don't commit violence to begin speaking up to the minority who do. This is my favourite program after 31 years of working in the field. Women can talk to groups until we're completely exhausted, as many of us have, but men don't listen to women. Men will listen to men.

I think we need to make violence against women as socially unacceptable as we have in focusing on smoking in anti-smoking campaigns and also as we've done in campaigns against drinking and driving. These are 30-year campaigns with multi-million dollar budgets in each province and territory, because we know that in trying to get people to quit smoking we're going to save money in health care down the road. It's the same thing with violence.

If we try to get people to speak up and to change the scenario, instead of women suffering in silence.... As one of the women spoke about earlier, when she experienced violence, everybody around her knew what was going on and nobody said anything. I think that phenomenon has existed throughout our history. It's time to break the silence on violence against women and to make this everybody's issue, because it's not just a women's issue.

It's an incredible program that we're doing with the B.C. Lions. My hat goes off to Rona Ambrose, because she was the first of many funders and partners to step in and see the benefit of having CFL players—it's kind of counterintuitive, having these big guys do it—speaking up about violence against women. In the first two years of this program, we've reached 29,000 kids in person. Because of the PSAs and the bus shelter ad space we've been given by the City of Vancouver and the City of Surrey, our message was viewed 66 million times.

● (1915)

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. I know that some of you have to leave, but before we suspend and go in to committee business, if it is the will of the committee to have a moment of silence....

Ms. Bennett, would you like to speak to that for a minute?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I was just made aware of a 16- or 17-year- old girl who is missing in Scarborough. Her mother is on Facebook asking.... As well, the families of Sisters in Spirit are posting about people who go missing every week, and if the committee would look to that or it's something we could do, I think it would ground our work.

The Chair: Do you know her name?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It was interesting. They didn't put up her name forward. The mother's name is Melissa and the cousin's name is Anwhatin.

The Chair: For Melissa's daughter—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: And for the—

The Chair: So is that okay?

Sorry...?

Mr. Greg Rickford: I don't think we should take this kind of thing lightly.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Frankly, Madam Chair, I think that when we have more information on this situation, and we can either authorize a statement or pay a respectful moment of silence to specific person, if that's in fact what we decide.... Perhaps we should, as part of our committee business, understand more fully how we would do this as a group.

The Chair: Develop perhaps a best practice—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I was hoping that the researchers could provide us every week with the names of the women who have gone missing and been murdered since we last met....

The Chair: I'm more than happy to talk about that under committee business.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Last week, NWAC did a general one. I think we could do it generally.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I have a suggestion on that. I think we—

The Chair: I think we should perhaps develop a process, a proper —

Ms. Jean Crowder: —should consider it in committee business.

The Chair: Yes. That would be fine.

What I'm going to do is to say thank you very much to our witnesses for your time and for lending us your expertise in this matter. We very much appreciate your being here with us tonight.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]