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## **Standing Committee on the Status of Women**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, November 27, 2014**

**Chair**

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc**



## Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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•(0845)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP)):** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the 38th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I would like to let you know that the meeting will be televised by Global Network. The procedure stays the same, with the exception of Global Network being here.

We are continuing our study of promising practices to prevent violence against women. Our study proposes solutions. We are therefore in “solutions” mode or “possible solutions” mode in order to combat the scourge of violence against women, whether in Canada or abroad. I would like to remind the witnesses and the members of the committee that we are looking at promising practices.

Each witness or group of witnesses will have 10 minutes for their presentation. A period of questions will then follow.

I would like to welcome Dr. Jocelynn Cook, scientific director at the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, and Ann Decter, director, Advocacy and Public Policy at YWCA Canada. We are also pleased to welcome, by videoconference from Vancouver, Lisa Steacy, representing the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres, as well as Kasari Govender, executive director of West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Cook, who has 10 minutes for her presentation.

[English]

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook (Scientific Director, Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada):** Thanks for the opportunity to be here.

As introduced, I'm Jocelynn Cook. I am the scientific director for the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, which is a member-based organization of about 3,000 members, including family physicians, nurses, midwives, obstetricians, and gynecologists.

Today I'm going to talk a little bit about pregnancy and violence, and touch on postpartum mental health. I will then talk a little bit about our guidelines for intimate partner violence, which you will receive a copy of, if you haven't already, and then the role of physicians in terms of best practices for preventing violence against women.

Everybody knows that violence against pregnant women is a threat to both maternal and fetal health as well as to newborn health. It's a unique stage in women's lives where they're particularly vulnerable because of their pregnancy.

The incidence of physical abuse during pregnancy has been reported to be between 4% and 17%. The data show there can be increases or decreases in abuse during pregnancy, or it can stay the same. There are different types of abuse that can occur.

We know that the acts of violence during pregnancy tend to be recurring and tend to escalate over time.

Violence against pregnant women can cause physical and psychological harm. It can lead to pregnancy complications, morbidity, and mortality for both the mother and the baby. It can also contribute towards poor outcomes for babies.

Some of the data show that because of violence, women may have delayed or no prenatal care. We know there are negative consequences associated with that. There's an increased risk for women who experience violence to use tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs, which also have negative impacts both on pregnancy and on fetal outcome. We can have maternal death. We can have low birth weight when babies are born, and pregnancy complications such as hemorrhaging, infection, poor weight gain, miscarriage, pre-term birth, and small babies. There can also be antenatal violence, which also has implications.

There are a number of studies, not a lot, but there are a few studies, that show a relationship between violence and postpartum mental health, which I think is really important to touch on.

We know that violence increases the risk of postpartum depression, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, PTSD, and other forms of psychosis. These data have been established.

The data also show that women who experienced violence before or during pregnancy reported higher levels of postpartum mental health problems. As the number of types of violence increased, so did the negative effects on postpartum mental health. Psychological violence, physical violence, and emotional violence increased the negative effects.

Mental health problems have also been shown to be associated with early breastfeeding discontinuation, bonding impairment between mother and babe, fewer positive parenting behaviours, substance abuse, self-harm, and some of the other indications of which you are probably all aware that are specific to women and which we touched on earlier.

With regard to physicians and violence against women, what is their role, and what can they do in terms of improving outcomes for women and their babies?

We know that approximately only 3% of incidents of violence against pregnant women are identified by primary care physicians. That's not a high proportion. We also know that even fewer cases are identified by obstetricians and gynecologists.

It's probably very important, and even essential, for physicians to become adept at identifying women who might be at risk of experiencing violence or abuse during their lives, as well as during pregnancy and the postpartum period. It's important for them to create an environment where it's safe for women to talk about their situations, so that the physicians can really start to understand the complexity of the environment in which they are living, and so that they can refer them for effective treatment and intervention.

• (0850)

Something that's really important is that routine perinatal care visits really offer excellent opportunities for health care providers to screen, to talk to women, to build those relationships, and to start to refer them to effective interventions and put into place and implement best practices for talking to women about complex issues related to lifestyle and behaviour, but also related to pregnancy.

What can we do in terms of better understanding the impacts of violence and abuse during pregnancy in the postnatal period, in this unique period? How can we better improve outcomes for women and their children?

The SOGC guidelines suggest that it's very important, as you might imagine, for health providers to create that safe environment, to really understand the context in which women are living, understand the linkages to the social determinants of health and the implications, and how those very specific contexts and situations that women are in with their children or during their pregnancy... What are some of the best options for interventions, for referral, to keep women and their babies safe?

We know that knowledge of whether women have actually experienced abuse will help to target as well those very important postpartum mental health interventions, which are really critical. There is research that examines the long-term impact of violence and abuse on maternal and child health, but we really need to bolster that research, have nice longitudinal studies where we can look at the specifics of situations of violence and then look at best effective practices that come out of that that improve outcomes.

There is some really exciting emerging data—and I'm a scientist, so forgive me for getting excited about this—that show that environmental factors, including stress and nutrition, can affect a woman's brain. Those brain changes can be passed on to future generations and could possibly cause children later in life to become more susceptible to insults—toxicological insults, physiological insults—potentially to an increased mental health risk. That's called epigenetics, when things in the environment can change the actual genes that can be passed on to future generations. We need to better understand that. We need to better understand what's happening

during the perinatal period that can affect child development later in life as well.

We need to develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to reduce violence during the perinatal period. Right now, with the information and best practices in the evaluation of those practices, it's difficult to determine during the post-pregnancy and the postpartum period which interventions should really be pinpointed. Again, as you can imagine, it really depends on the situation that the woman is living in. It depends on the resources that are available. It depends on that whole complex context.

We really need more information from well-conducted studies that determine the optimal interventions. It's also very important for our organization to recognize the impact that violence and abuse have on pregnant women and their babies, their fetuses, and all the outcomes, and to work together to help to create knowledge opportunities for health care providers, to help them understand what resources are out there, where they can refer women, and really help facilitate and advocate through that health system. I think that's really important. We as an organization are thinking about helping to create some of those learning opportunities for our members that cross the health sectors that deal with perinatal health.

Thank you.

• (0855)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Cook. Your presentation was very interesting.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Decter, from YWCA Canada.

Ms. Decter, you have 10 minutes.

[*English*]

**Ms. Ann Decter (Director, Advocacy and Public Policy, YWCA Canada):** Thank you.

Much has changed since male MPs responded with laughter and derision when MP Margaret Mitchell stood in the House of Commons in the early 1980s to demand that the government take action to stop domestic violence. Nevertheless, 25 years after the murders at l'École Polytechnique, with much good work accomplished, the issue of violence against women and girls is still very much with us.

Thank you for looking again at this issue and for including YWCA Canada in this discussion.

In a year that has been flooded with news of violence, we know that urgent action is needed on prevention. Across most of the country, there is a mature social service system that responds to women escaping violence. From single safe houses established by feminist activists in the 1970s, we now have networks of shelters for abused women offering a range of support serving most of Canada's population.

These have proven to be a very successful practice in addressing violence against women and need to be maintained. There are gaps in the access to shelter that need to be addressed to prevent recurring violence. Shelter access is inadequate for women in the northern territories, for rural women, for deaf women and women with disabilities, for first nations, Métis, and Inuit women, and for women from Canada's wide range of cultural communities. Expanding shelters and ensuring that shelters have appropriate services to close these gaps is a promising practice.

In particular, access to this successful practice needs to be expanded for abused women with mental health and addiction issues. Shelters have begun to adapt successfully to serve this population by adopting a clear conceptual approach committed to serving all women, including women struggling with complex issues. This shift in model also shifts ways of working to a harm-reduction approach encompassing, among other changes, working comfortably in a grey zone guided by circumstances and the needs of women and children, rather than by set rules and procedures, saying yes rather than no as often as possible, and understanding and implementing a trauma-informed approach to work.

These practices are documented in YWCA Canada's March 2014 study "Saying Yes" and in BC Society of Transition Houses' reducing barriers research and training. More shelters are eager to adopt these approaches, and training in these promising practices is in need of funding.

The provincial, territorial, and national associations of shelters and transition houses facilitate research, training, innovation, policy development, and knowledge exchange. These associations are best practices in preventing violence against women and should be supported by the government.

Safe lives post-shelter require ensuring that women have access to safe, affordable, and permanent homes, quality child care, and adequate incomes. YWCA Canada's research with women in shelters revealed that what happens when women leave the shelter is essential to preventing women from facing further abuse. Nine out of ten women leaving the shelter do not plan to return to their spouses, but four out of ten do not know where they will live.

Of the over 200,000 people estimated to be homeless in Canada, about half are women. Violence, combined with poverty, is the major driver of women's homelessness, and homeless women are highly vulnerable to violence. Preventing violence requires preventing women's homelessness.

Women leaving shelters need access to permanent affordable housing. There are a wide variety of successful practices that should be pursued to increase women's access to affordable housing, including prioritizing women's access to social housing, rent control, rent subsidies, seeding non-profits to create housing, requiring affordable housing units in all housing developments, and direct development of social housing by government.

Where it is safe to do so, women who have experienced violence should retain possession of the home, and men who perpetrate violence should be required to find new housing. This is a promising practice in place in some Canadian jurisdictions. In Manitoba, the Residential Tenancies Act was amended to permit women to

terminate rental leases when the residence becomes unsafe due to domestic violence.

The streets are not safe for women, and women hide their homelessness. The wholesale shift of Homelessness Partnering Secretariat funding to the Housing First model with access criteria based on chronic and episodic homelessness needs to be accompanied by a deliberate strategy to connect women generally, and women in shelters for abused women in particular. YWCA Calgary's community house is a promising practice for this, and My Sister's Place in London has a pilot project for a model as well.

Mothers who have left abusive spouses need access to the workforce. Affordable, quality child care allows mothers to support themselves and their children through employment.

- (0900)

Research on Quebec's low-cost, broad-based child care system confirms that child care dramatically increases single mothers' access to employment. Based on the Quebec experience, it is hard to overstate the positive impact of widespread access to low-cost child care on women raising children on their own.

Between 1996, when low-cost child care was introduced in Quebec, and 2008, the number of single mothers on social assistance was reduced by more than half, from 99,000 to 45,000. The after-tax median income of single mothers rose by 81%. Poverty rates for single parent families headed by women declined from 36% to 22%, from more than a third to less than a quarter. Low-cost, affordable child care is a proven practice for preventing violence against women.

To prevent violence or a return to violence, women need an adequate standard of living. Income support and social assistance levels need to keep women and children out of poverty, not in it. Child support payments for children when their mother is on social assistance should not be deducted from the mother's social assistance income. A court case on this has been launched in British Columbia. Eliminating this practice across the country would be a promising practice.

Sexual assault centres are an excellent and long-established practice supporting women who have experienced sexual violence. Their role in preventing violence has long been undervalued. Research shows that there are 460,000 sexual assaults annually in this country: for every 1,000 assaults, 33 are reported to the police, 29 are recorded as a crime, twelve have charges laid, six are prosecuted, and three are convicted. Many of these women receive the support of sexual assault centres.

For the past month, we've witnessed women speaking out on their experiences of sexual violence. Women speaking out need to feel that police forces and court systems will respond fully and supportively to the crimes committed. Police and court systems must begin to work better for the women who have experienced violence than for the men who have committed it. Access to justice is an issue for all women who experience violence. Women who access shelters often face a variety of legal processes without access to counsel due to limitations on legal aid. Lack of access to justice is particularly acute for indigenous women.

YWCA Canada's two-year building capacity project provided training on legal information for violence services workers aimed at increasing access to justice for aboriginal women dealing with violence. As well, the website [vawlawinfo.ca](http://vawlawinfo.ca) houses the training materials from this project. The Nunavut violence services legal information manual, in English and in Inuktitut, explains Nunavut's Family Abuse Intervention Act to the workers for the first time.

Legal information training for violence services staff is a promising practice, and funding is needed to continue training. We recommend to the committee the work of Luke's Place in Ontario, lawyer Pamela Cross, and the Ontario government court worker program.

Reducing violence against indigenous women must be a priority in preventing violence. Recent reports on the low incidence of grants from Status of Women Canada for projects focused on aboriginal women suggest strongly that Status of Women Canada should adopt the practice of issuing calls for proposals with a specific focus on aboriginal women. Funding where the need is greatest has always been a rewarding practice.

Changing the behaviour of men and boys is essential to the long-term prevention of violence against women and girls. At YWCA Canada, we are hopeful that these days of brutal revelations and women breaking silence will constitute a changed moment in the long struggle to end violence against women and girls. When men in leadership stand up in public to say that violence against women is not okay, they increase the momentum for change and stem the tide of sexist backlash.

This week, along with the launch of our annual rose campaign to end violence against women and girls, we launched a new initiative, #NOTokay, intended to reach the general public. To prevent violence against women and girls, we need the kind of societal shift in attitude that happened with drinking and driving and with smoking in public places. Long-term public awareness campaigns were essential to making those changes, and they will be essential to preventing violence.

The websites [notokay.ca](http://notokay.ca) and [pascorrect.ca](http://pascorrect.ca) went live this week, and the distinctive red X logo spread across social media sites. We are hopeful that it will join the many campaigns bringing awareness to this issue with the message that when people think something is not okay, it's time to say it's not okay.

• (0905)

To address these gaps, to coordinate policies and services across jurisdictions, to continue to move forward towards safer lives, and to prevent, reduce, and eventually end violence, Canada needs to

develop a national action plan on violence against women. That must begin with a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women.

Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Decter.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Steacy, for 10 minutes.

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Steacy (Representative, Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres):** First I would like to thank the committee for inviting the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres/ L'Association canadienne des centres contre les agressions à caractère sexuel, which I'll refer to as CASAC, to present today.

Founded in 1975, CASAC member centres continue to provide front-line crisis support and intervention to women who have experienced men's violence, from Halifax to Vancouver, in English and French, in urban centres and rural communities.

One of the crucial functions of CASAC is to speak publicly for the thousands of women who tell us their stories on confidential phone lines. Every woman who calls a CASAC centre takes the risk of speaking honestly and deliberately about the violence she has experienced. I would be doing these women a disservice if I did not speak similarly here today.

Any discussion of promising practices to prevent violence against women requires an honest and deliberate definition of what exactly we are trying to prevent. The phrase "violence against women" elides a fact that must be central to this study, namely that men are responsible for the continued rape, battering, harassment, incest, and prostitution of women.

December 6 this year will mark 25 years since 14 women at L'École Polytechnique were separated from male teachers and peers and then gunned down by one man specifically because they were women. There is still no public or private place in Canada, other than rape crisis centres and transition houses, in which women are completely safe or free from the threat of men's violence.

Battering husbands or ex-husbands in B.C. have been responsible for attempting to murder women, and in some cases their children, in their homes on 17 separate occasions so far this year.

In May, the RCMP confirmed 1,181 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women, deaths and disappearances for which men were overwhelmingly responsible. Since then, men's lethally sexist and racist attacks on aboriginal women have continued unabated. We know that at least Rinelle Harper in Winnipeg and Marlene Bird in Saskatchewan were sexually assaulted, brutally beaten, and left for dead by small groups of men in public places.

In February, at least two male athletes and students from the University of Ottawa's hockey team raped a young woman in Thunder Bay. Last year female students at UBC and St. Mary's were oriented to their university experience with male-led chants promoting their rape.

Rehtaeh Parsons was raped by young men, and young men continue to attack her by creating and distributing pornographic images of that rape.

The buyers of sex who will soon be criminalized by Bill C-36 for the exploitation of women in prostitution in brothels and on the streets are overwhelmingly men.

More than 330 women RCMP officers and employees have exposed that they were systematically sexually harassed on the job by their male colleagues.

Women have come forward and gone on the record to say that CBC's Jian Ghomeshi used his power and status to attack a number of women he worked with and dated.

These recent and highly publicized cases of men's violence against women echo what we hear when we respond to women who call the crisis lines, from the women who reveal and resist the routine and myriad acts of violence that enforce and exploit women's unequal civic, political, economic, and social power in relation to men. The inequalities of poverty and racism further compound the vulnerability to and effects of men's violence on impoverished women, women of colour, and aboriginal women.

If any practice or policy to prevent violence against women is to be truly promising, it must be grounded in and tested against the promise of women's right to be free from all forms of sexist discrimination and violence. This promise is enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and articulated in international instruments, including CEDAW, to which Canada is a signatory.

I'll take today's opportunity to reiterate two of the elements of policy change on violence against women that CASAC has advocated for, for decades: first, the responsibility of the criminal justice system to prevent and respond to men's violence, and second, the need for the government to invest in and actively and respectfully consult with the independent women's movement.

Since CASAC is a coalition of rape crisis centres and time is limited, I'll focus on criminal law responses to sexual assaults.

Past improvements to Canada's criminal laws and policy on sexual assaults have been made because of the demands of women and women's groups that criminal law protect their right to equality by preventing and sanctioning the violence that is perpetrated by men against them. Two examples of the hard-won achievements are the criminalization of rape in marriage in the Criminal Code and Supreme Court articulations of the legal obligation to obtain explicit and ongoing consent to sexual activity.

● (0910)

Sexual assault is a deeply gendered crime. Women are the most likely victims of this crime and the least likely to commit it. The criminal justice response to sexual assault is abysmal. Only 0.3% of rapes committed result in a criminal conviction. Statistically

speaking, the criminal justice response to rape is one of virtual impunity.

Since the 1970s the statistic that 70% of women who report all forms of sexist violence to front-line anti-violence workers do not engage the police has remained steady. Less than 10% of sexual assaults are reported to the police. Several of the cases that I mentioned earlier have fiercely reignited a public discussion of and debate about the way that the criminal justice system routinely fails women who have been raped. The hashtag "been raped never reported" allowed women to say on social media what rape crisis workers and raped women have known and said publicly and privately for years: women do not and cannot rely on Canadian authorities to live up to their responsibility to enforce the laws that criminalize sexual assaults and violence against women.

In the Ghomeshi case, women came out in a significant number to expose the actions of a violent man and to explain why they did not report these attacks to the police. A tremendous amount of media attention was paid and in turn public pressure was exerted. Feminists reiterated our criticism of the failures to apply criminal law to levy consequences against men in cases of violence against women. Yesterday Jian Ghomeshi was arrested for and charged with several counts of sexual assault and one count of choking a woman. This demonstrates that when there's substantial political will, police and the criminal justice system can and do have the power to swiftly investigate and lay charges when a man attacks a woman.

Rehtaeh Parsons reported her rape to the police before it was public knowledge and national news. After her suicide, pressure from her grieving parents and an outraged public, including feminists, for a response from the criminal justice system mounted. Earlier this week two young men pleaded guilty to charges of making and distributing child pornography in that case. The creation and distribution of the images of her attack have been acknowledged as a crime. No one has been charged with the attack itself.

Rape is ultimately the responsibility of the men who commit it. The inadequacy of the criminal justice system's response to sexual assault provides one stark example of the systemic failure to adequately prevent and respond to the injustices committed against women, both individually and collectively. Criminal laws contain the promise that men will be held accountable for the violence that they commit. Accountability through assiduous application of existing criminal law would demonstrate that the government is committed to preventing the rampant continuation of these crimes.

CASAC research has shown that when a woman is provided with information, accompaniment, and advocacy from a rape crisis centre, her slim chances of having a proper police investigation done and charges laid increase.

Rape crisis centres in Canada were formed in a period when women across the country were uniting to challenge and transform the status quo of women's lives. They were established in the 1970s with, by, and for women of different ages, races, classes, and backgrounds who were taking direct action against men's violence. Rape crisis centres have received no operational funding from the federal government. In British Columbia, where I live and work, no rape crisis centre, including the one I answer the lines at, receives operational funds from the provincial government.

The increased impoverishment of women and the systematic dismantling of social welfare systems means that the remaining unfunded independent women's centres are pressured to tend to all the effects of women's desperate inequality, including hunger, homelessness, addiction, and mental health. Yet CASAC centres continue to connect women to the meagre supports to which they are entitled, to services, and to each other. They connect women's experiences of and responses to men's violence to advocacy campaigns for specific reforms and systemic social change locally, provincially, and nationally.

In 2012, the largest ever global study on violence against women concluded:

The autonomous mobilization of feminists in domestic and transnational contexts—not leftist parties, women in government or national wealth—is the critical factor accounting for policy change.

The development of policy and practices to prevent violence against women will be ineffective without a substantial investment in and incomplete without an active and respectful consultation with the independent women's movement.

● (0915)

The piecemeal projects proffered and funding promised so far in these hearings by the federal government are not an adequate substitute for a substantive and sustained commitment from all departments at all levels of government to preventing and eliminating women's civil, economic, social, and political inequality.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Steacy.

Now, Mrs. Govender, for 10 minutes.

● (0920)

**Ms. Kasari Govender (Executive Director, West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund):** Thank you for having me here today. I'm pleased to be here to talk about best practices and preventing violence against women.

As you know, I am the executive director of West Coast LEAF. West Coast LEAF works to achieve equality by changing historic patterns of systemic discrimination against women through B.C.-based equality rights litigation, law reform, and public legal education.

Personally, my expertise is in women's substantive equality and constitutional law. I mention that because I'm happy to answer questions of a legal nature and I'll speak to that perspective today.

I want to start by talking about what I think is the beginning point of this conversation about solutions. Violence against women is

inherently gendered. We cannot understand violence against women, or prevent it, without understanding that at its root it is about sexism and power imbalances in society between men and women but also imbalances based on race, disability, indigeneity, place of origin, and economic status.

It is absolutely vital to understand that violence against women is a manifestation of women's inequality. On average, every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. Half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16. Eighty-three per cent of all police-reported domestic assaults are against women. Women are three times as likely to experience serious violence such as choking, beating, being threatened with a knife or gun, and sexual violence. This is not a matter of men behaving badly; this is sociological phenomenon and it requires a systemic and systematic solution.

While we know that reducing violence against women entails social change, law has an important role to play in manifesting and creating that change. Our Constitution guarantees equality both before and under the law, including on the basis of sex, and guarantees security of the person equally between men and women. This means that the government has an obligation to ensure that its laws and policies at the very least do not perpetuate inequality or violence, and do not act as obstacles for women seeking to leave an abusive relationship. Yet, there are many laws and policies that do just that.

It was hard to decide how to prioritize which laws and policies I wanted to speak to today, but I am going to speak in some detail about the ways in which recent changes to immigration and refugee law impede a woman's ability to leave an abusive relationship safely. Women are most at risk when they leave relationships. In fact, nearly 60% of all dating violence happens after the woman has broken off the relationship, and 25% of all women who are murdered by their spouse had left the relationship already. Creating safe conditions in which women do not fear for their safety, fear for their children's safety, fear that they will be deported, that they will be homeless, or that they will lose custody of their children is absolutely essential to the prevention of violence. Best practices show us this.

There are a number of recent immigration law and policy changes that place women at risk. In looking at best practices, these changes are clearly worst practices and must be reversed. Let's start with the safe countries of origin scheme. The designated countries of origin, the DCO list, is a list of 35 countries that Canada has deemed to be safe countries for refugees. In cases where a claimant comes from one of these designated countries, her process is fast-tracked, which cuts the time that she has to prepare for a hearing in half and compromises the claimant's ability to gather evidence and prove her claim. A claimant in this circumstance is also denied eligibility for certain procedural protections, such as access to an appeals process, which are afforded to claimants under the regular system and are essential to ensure procedural fairness in an administrative law process.

Under the DCO scheme, the minister has sole discretion to designate a country as safe. The minister considers rejection and abandonment rates of claims from the country in question, as well as the country's governmental and judicial institutions, but does not consult with human rights experts.

The DCO places women at risk. For example, violence against women is a massive problem in Mexico, and its legal structure is insufficient to keep women safe, as recognized in the 2014 world report of Human Rights Watch. For example, they have laws that make the severity of punishments for some sexual offenses contingent upon the chastity of the victim, which contradicts international standards, and similar standards have been condemned by Canadian courts as contrary to the rights of women. While Mexico has been designated as a DCO, it is clearly an unsafe situation for women experiencing violence in that country. A woman fleeing violence to Canada will face minimal procedural protections, no right of appeal, and little time to prepare for her hearing, all because Mexico is a democratic country and Mexican refugees face a high rate of rejection by our refugee determination process. The DCO list clearly puts women at risk of greater violence.

• (0925)

This practice of designating safe third world countries should be discontinued for all women making gender-based discrimination claims. At the very least it must have a more accountable form of decision-making for who does the designating of the country as safe. It must include an examination of the record of that country on how it deals with violence against women.

Turning to conditional permanent residency, a change that was made in October 2012, the federal government amended Canada's immigration regulations by introducing the status of conditional permanent resident for spouses. Spouses must, as a condition of this permanent resident status, cohabit continuously in a conjugal relationship with their spouse for a period of two years after they receive their permanent residency, except where the sponsoring spouse engages in abusive or neglectful behaviour, or if the spouse is deceased.

This exception for violence is not sufficient. The threat of deportation has been consistently documented as a tool used by abusers to keep their victims quiet about their violence. Making permanent residence conditional puts vulnerable women and

children at greater risk of abuse by creating barriers for a woman to leave that relationship.

Tying immigration status to remaining in a spousal relationship poses a number of possible risks to vulnerable groups even with this exemption. For example, women with language and cultural barriers may not understand that there is an exception, and the exception is not broadly publicized. Abusers can use the threat of deportation to keep a woman from leaving. Abusers can threaten to tell the immigration officer that the woman is lying about the abuse, or that their whole relationship is a fraud. Many women aren't willing to take the risk. They will lose their status given that there is no guarantee that a CIC officer will agree that they fit within the exception.

It is clear that this policy puts women at risk by undermining their ability to leave an abusive relationship, and it must be repealed.

I want to flag a number of points for follow-up questions. I won't go into them in a lot of depth.

The first is economic security. Others have already spoken about this here today. Women face significant obstacles in leaving relationships because of a lack of economic security. In various places across our country, there has been success in providing a safety net for women leaving relationships through the provision of legal aid, day care, housing security, and sufficient income security. In other places there are significant gaps in services such as the significant gap in legal aid in B.C. There are no national standards in these areas to ensure that women are able to be financially independent enough to leave an abusive relationship and support themselves and their children while dealing with the fallout of a relationship breakdown.

For example, federal transfer payments are no longer regulated so that they go to legal aid. They're no longer tied to legal aid as the federal government used to do. This would help to ensure that women had access to a lawyer to deal with custody, access, child support, and property division. If they knew they had access to a lawyer, or housing, or employment, they would be more supported in leaving.

I want to make a brief point about education. It's clear from the recent national dialogue about sexual violence that many Canadians do not understand the law of consent to sexual activity, nor is there widespread understanding of the power dynamics in which sexual violence flourishes. It is vital that this education happen early in life, that it be based on the understanding of the power and balances in gender dynamics and the underlying violence against women, and that it occur comprehensively in schools across the country.

At West Coast LEAF we see first hand the light bulbs go off for young people when we deliver our program called No Means No. This is a workshop for grades seven to nine on sexual consent and the legal rights and obligation that young people and adults have in intimate relationships.

I want to talk briefly about cybermisogyny and the cyberbullying of women and girls which we think is important to understand from the context of gender. Earlier this year, we released a report called “#CyberMisogyny: Using and strengthening Canadian legal responses to gendered hate and harassment online“. We did this project in response to both the number of high-profile and tragic cases of girls and young women facing online abuse and the more invisible, but increasingly common cases of what are called revenge porn sites, the sharing of intimate images without consent, cyberstalking, and online hate speech.

• (0930)

In this report we make a number of recommendations to government and—

**The Chair:** Mrs. Govender, I would ask you to briefly conclude, and we will start with the questions.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** I will for sure. I'm sorry. I'm on my last paragraph here.

In this report we make a number of recommendations to government, including the creation of a new office independent of government, but focused within the federal ministry of the Status of Women to conduct research, to facilitate dialogue, and to make recommendations to government about appropriate legal responses to the challenges of protecting and promoting the equality of women and girls and other vulnerable communities online.

Thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

We will now move to questions from members of the committee.

Ms. Truppe, the floor is yours. You have seven minutes.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC):** Welcome and thank you for being here and giving us your feedback.

I have a few questions, perhaps for each of you, depending on how our time goes; it always goes so quickly.

I'll start with Ann from the YWCA.

The whole premise of this study is for us to get best practices and promising practices from things that are being done that would be very helpful to other groups or communities across Canada that aren't aware of them. That is why we are trying to get some. I didn't hear a lot from the YWCA, and I know they are such a great organization and are well known across Canada. I was just wondering if there is anything the YWCA has done that you would like to include as a best practice, something you think is such a great thing that would help women and girls that you would like to share it.

**Ms. Ann Decter:** Certainly there is the research we got from the “Saying Yes” report, the subtitle of which is “Effective Practices in Sheltering Women with Mental Health and Addiction Issues”. What we're hearing in some of the provinces—not all of them and not so much in the Prairies—is that shelters are seeing more and more abused women with mental health and addiction issues coming to their door. A greater percentage of the women who are coming are

those women, and fewer of them are coming directly from domestic violence incidents. There is a strong appetite for increased skills and training around how to deal with that. The report “Saying Yes” lists a number of practices that can help a shelter shift to the model.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Are those in that report?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** Yes. I can send you the full report or the executive summary, whichever you like.

Also, BC Society of Transition Houses has been doing research and training in this area for a while. There's really a strong appetite for training and a really a lack of funding to get it there.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** So, training is huge.

**Ms. Ann Decter:** Yes. It's training on dealing with those women and supporting them.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Thank you.

Are you familiar with Power of Being a Girl?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** I am. Power of Being a Girl is one of our programs. It's an empowerment conference for young girls of, I think, mid-school years. We run it across the country during Week Without Violence. We do consider it a very successful practice for really empowering girls so they can lead in their own lives.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Empowering is very important. I know at Status of Women we've done many things to try to empower young girls, because that has to start at a young age.

**Ms. Ann Decter:** Absolutely.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Is there something that came out of this conference that you would like to share which again would help someone else who wants to empower young girls?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** It's actually an annual conference that many of our YWCAs run locally. We have a whole tool kit on how to do it, which we are happy to share with anyone at all, really.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Perfect. Thank you very much.

My next question is for Lisa from the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres.

One of the goals of the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres is to work for the prevention and the eradication of sexual assault. From everything you've done, is there a best practice you would like to share?

**Ms. Lisa Steacy:** I think the most effective force for ensuring that the government meets its responsibility to prevent and eradicate sexual assault is the very existence of sexual assault centres. What we provide every day, 24 hours a day, and have consistently provided since the 1970s is independent accompaniment, advocacy, and information.

I know that recently with sexual assault cases in the news, there's been a lot of discussion about inventing programs, services, or practices to prepare women for what they're going to go through if they report to the police, if the case goes to court. That's something that rape crisis centres are very, very good at and have been doing for a very long time.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** You also provide mechanisms for communication and education. I think that's one of your important goals as well.

Is there a really good communication factor that you would like to put as a best practice, something that you or your organization have done really well?

• (0935)

**Ms. Lisa Steacy:** One thing we did very well in order to communicate to both the government and the general public about what exactly we do at sexual assault centres and what exactly we need, is we conducted a five-year action-based research project on the relationship between the equality promise in the charter and violence against women. We looked at 100 cases of violence against women across the country and looked at the specific failures, and made specific recommendations to improve and address those failures at all levels of the criminal justice system. That particular study is something that was effectively communicated.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** That would be a good one. Great. Thank you very much.

Jocelyn, from the Canadian Foundation for Women's Health, thank you for your information as well.

I think you funded a University of British Columbia project. Dr. Patricia Janssen had a project, I believe, from the University of British Columbia. She said, "The CFWH grant has allowed us to learn about ways that health professionals can help protect pregnant women from partner-perpetrated violence." Was there anything you can tell us about this particular project that might also have a best practice?

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook:** Yes. That project was one of the few papers that were published specific to pregnant women. It showed that health professionals have a role to play in understanding the signs, the risk factors, and the implications related to violence during pregnancy and the postpartum period. It suggested that what women need really differs according to what kind of violence they're experiencing. The study was a little bit inconclusive with what was best in terms of practices. It also depended on what was available.

What these other women and their organizations have been talking about in terms of keeping women safe, in terms of financial support, child care support, legal aid came out in that study as interventions or services, and access to those services that women also needed during pregnancy. The time lines were maybe a little bit tighter in terms of keeping babies and fetuses safe during that vulnerable time. That was a very well-conducted study.

What we took out of that is helping health providers at the front line understand what women need specifically, depending on the context they're living in, what's available to them in terms of services in their community, how those services can be accessed, and what they can do in their role as a health care provider to help women navigate that system and follow up. That study catalyzed a lot of discussion around what we can do to help support our health professionals in that role.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ashton, the floor is yours. You have seven minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you very much to our witnesses who are with us today. I realize that for our witnesses in B.C. it's an extra effort, given the time difference, so thank you very much for making that effort to be with us this morning.

I want to go back to a key theme that you brought up in your presentation, Ms. Decter, around a national action plan. You spoke of the systemic issues that are involved in violence against women. You spoke of poverty. You spoke of the particular violence that indigenous women, racialized women and disabled women face. These are discussions that we're hearing a lot with reference to the need for a national action plan.

I've actually put forward a motion calling on the government to implement one. That is a response to the fact that so many people in the violence against women community are calling for this kind of action.

I'm wondering if you could speak to what, according to the YWCA, a national action plan could achieve.

**Ms. Ann Decter:** I spoke to a lot of gaps in the systems that have been created. To be clear, we're not starting from zero in terms of responses to violence against women in this country, so we would want a national action plan to incorporate everything that's existing, but the advantage it would have is to address on a national scale the gaps in services, the legal system, coordinating various gaps across jurisdictions. It could set standards for the country and ensure that those standards are met, basically by tagging the funding.

We think it would be a huge advantage in places like...we have YWCAs in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, where an enormous amount of service change is needed. They should have the same standards as we have in Toronto.

• (0940)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Absolutely. You spoke a bit about issues of housing as well. You gave great focus to that. Could that be something that's part of a national action plan to end violence against women?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** Absolutely. We would see it coordinating with national action on poverty and on housing and homelessness. We did a major research study that produced a paper, "Beyond Shelter". Housing and homelessness for women, housing and poverty for women were key issues in violence against women.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Finally, you spoke about how a national action plan ought to include a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. This is a critical issue for any woman across Canada, and frankly, for any Canadian. I'm wondering if you could speak to why YWCA Canada believes there ought to be a national inquiry.

**Ms. Ann Decter:** We would see it as a precursor to drawing up the national action plan. There would be evidence that would feed into what's needed in a national action plan.

I think we've seen continuing violence across the country this year. It's clearly the highest need action area, and the more that non-indigenous Canadians hear about this issue, the more their attitudes change. That's what's really needed, and that can be provided by a national inquiry, not a five- or ten-year royal commission with a big set of recommendations that don't get acted upon, but a national inquiry that listens to the people who are suffering from this.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you, Ms. Decter.

Ms. Govender, I'd like to turn to you. I know West Coast LEAF has also spoken to the need for a comprehensive national action plan with particular emphasis on the need for coordinated legal aid services in our country, something which the federal government has stepped away from quite significantly over time. I'm wondering if you could speak to why West Coast LEAF views a national action plan as necessary when dealing with violence against women.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** Yes. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, I think what's needed are national standards in a number of different areas around economic security for women, that being one of the direct pieces of connection to violence here. If women are empowered and independent financially, they are more able to leave relationships safely. I think that would include national strategies on housing, poverty, legal aid and child care, and that all of those aspects would support women in very necessary ways.

If I can speak for a moment about legal aid in particular, there are very different legal aid plans across the country. I can tell you that in British Columbia, family law legal aid in particular is in crisis. It's not just in B.C.; there are other areas in the country, but of course I know B.C. the best.

What that means is that if women leave relationships, they have absolutely no assurance that they will get assistance with their custody and access matters. In fact, the eligibility is so narrow that you can make barely over minimum wage and not qualify. You only qualify if there's violence in the relationship, and even if both those criteria are in place, you only get 25 hours, which is often only enough to get a protection order in place. So women are left to deal with their abuser, trying to get custody, trying to have division of property, if there is any, and trying to get spousal and child support. These are incredible risk factors for women, which create a lot of fear about leaving relationships, and about what they might lose if they go when they have no support to fight for those things.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you very much, Ms. Govender.

You spoke in particular in the case of B.C., and on my last visit there, the feedback focused on the lack of legal aid services was overwhelming. In fact, I would even say, I heard more about it there than I've heard in other parts of the country. It could also be a reflection of the kind of advocacy that so many organizations are engaging in to highlight this important area.

I'm just going to ask—

• (0945)

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Right.

Maybe I'll leave off by thanking you. I look forward to getting some more time to ask you more questions afterwards.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barlow, the floor is yours for seven minutes.

[*English*]

**Mr. John Barlow (Macleod, CPC):** Thanks again to everybody for being here today. I appreciate the time and the commitment. It's wonderful to hear everyone's passion on this issue. Hopefully we can use some of the best practices and the ideas that you're giving us to put to good use.

Ms. Decter, I want to speak to you first. I will let you know that the minister has tabled the action plan on violent crimes, family violence and violence against aboriginal women and girls. I think that's a great step in the right direction.

I think you're also maybe selling yourself a little bit short here in case I heard this wrong, but one of the biggest things that we're trying to do is break that cycle. You talked about it passing on from generation to generation. I thought you said that nine out of ten women that leave the YWCA shelters don't return to that home that is the source of the violence. Is that right?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** The statistic I had wasn't specific to YWCA shelters. I believe it's from talking to women in shelters. Nine of ten women, while they're in shelters, don't intend to return to their previous home and spousal relationship.

**Mr. John Barlow:** But then you said that four out of ten do?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** No. Four out of ten who don't want to go back don't know where they will go. That's the gap in access to housing that needs to be filled somehow.

**Mr. John Barlow:** All right.

With regard to your suggestion on that nine out of ten and the experience you have in the shelters, what are some of the ideas or some of the things that we can look at to improve that number, so that when they do...? It's so important that they actually do seek help and go to a shelter. That's often the most difficult thing: to get them out of the house first.

**Ms. Ann Decter:** Right.

**Mr. John Barlow:** What are we missing there? Once they've made that step, how do we get them to the next step, to not return and continue that cycle?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** As I mentioned, it needs to be easier to find housing that's safe and affordable. In most places, it's the lack of stock; there is a lack of safe, affordable housing where they are.

Other supports that have been really helpful include ongoing outreach post-leaving shelter. That, from our studies, seems to really reduce the rate at which women return to shelter. In the VAW shelters, they have a lot of services, but not in homeless shelters. There's a huge difference there, and sometimes it's the same population in the two kinds of shelters. You'll find a lot of women who have been in abusive situations in homeless shelters where there are zero supports, which is one of the reasons we're trying to get doors to shelters for abused women open wider for women with mental health and addiction issues.

When they leave the shelter, typically a lot of those services don't exist, so follow-up is huge. You come from a situation; you leave in an emergency situation and you perhaps don't have identification with you or anything like that. Then you go somewhere that's safe and comfortable, where over time you get a lot of support to find somewhere to live, hopefully, to get your kids into schools, and to go through a massive legal process, which may or may not work for you at all. Then on leaving the shelter, it's gone. Those supports continuing into the community are huge.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Ms. Govender, you mentioned the No Means No program that you're offering to grade 7 students. I find this really interesting. I think it's really important that we start this education sooner rather than later. Is this a program that you're offering through B.C. education's sex-ed curriculum or is this something you're offering on your own? Is it for boys as well as girls? Can you explain that program a little bit?

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** I'll answer the second question first. It is for boys and girls. An important piece of the program is that it educates both boys and girls about the power imbalances, as I say, sexism, racism, and understanding those terms, and understanding stereotype and gender bias, for example, in the media. That's the first component of the workshop. Then we move into how those stereotypes play out in relationships. We talk about the law of sexual consent in that context, rights and obligations. We think it's really important to reach boys and girls in that context and to educate boys, for example, about what this really means. What is respectful communication? What are the rules that apply as they grow into relationships and grow into dating?

We offer the program. We're not funded through the school system, but we do offer the program in schools. It's an independent program. We promote it and get contacted by schools that want to offer the program. We are in the process of expanding into other places in the province, although right now we're mostly in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island. We also sometimes offer it to community groups that have youth groups, gay and lesbian groups, immigrant groups, immigrant settlement services, and that kind of thing.

• (0950)

**Mr. John Barlow:** How has the response been to the program? Have you had follow-up in terms of the impact it's had? I'm thinking that if it works, move it to other school districts. Was the response from the school division itself quite welcoming as well?

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** Yes, absolutely. We've expanded the program a lot in the last few years, and the response is increasingly positive. We introduced a new program this year called TrendShift that is based on our work, as I mentioned, our cybermisogyny work. We produced a report with recommendations. There are recommendations for the federal government in there as well.

We also created a little legal information booklet called "Is That Legal?" and did a workshop. We're getting a tremendous response on that now as well. In fact, we're booked to reach hundreds of students already in the new year. That's quite exciting. That was based on feedback we got from young people with questions such as how this law of consent applies in cyberspace, in online space, on smartphones, and what this means. Of course, that's an important

space for young people to occupy, and we want to ensure that the space is productive and safe for young people when they're there.

That's also an important piece of that. We have, as I say, a really positive response in all the communities that we're in currently, and we hope to expand that program

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mrs. Govender and Mr. Barlow.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Duncan, go ahead. You have seven minutes.

[*English*]

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** I'd like to thank all the witnesses for the work they do each and every day. We're enormously grateful.

I'll begin with West Coast LEAF.

Mrs. Govender, if you could make a specific recommendation to this committee that you would like to see in the committee's report, what would it be regarding the DCO list, please?

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** I don't think it's a productive tool for women in general, but I will say the specific recommendation would be to exempt women who are making gender-based persecution claims. At the very least there should be a more accountable process for the minister in designating third countries and a process by which the record on domestic violence and the laws on domestic violence, on sexual violence, on violence against women are examined to consider as to whether they actually keep women safe. That should be a key component of whether a country is designated on the DCO list.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you, Mrs. Govender.

The second question I'll ask is, can you make a specific recommendation to the committee that you would like to see in the committee's report? What would it be regarding conditional permanent status?

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** It would be that the conditional permanent status provisions be revoked. The federal government has not provided conclusive evidence that there is a widespread fraud problem, which is the justification for this provision, or really significantly, that this provision actually is going to prevent marriage fraud. I should be more specific: marriage fraud in immigration. There really isn't a strong purpose for it, and it should be revoked entirely.

• (0955)

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you. You would like to see it be revoked.

With regard to cybermisogyny, the government has passed legislation in the area of cyberbullying. I'm wondering what your opinion is on that legislation.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** Sure. You know, it is passed. My feeling about it is there are some really good provisions in it about criminalizing the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. I think that is positive. I think it's unfortunate that it was coupled with provisions that look like they may very well contravene the charter around rights to privacy. It's unfortunate because I think that the legislation will likely be challenged in court and it will ultimately delay the application of what I think is a very positive development which, as I say, is the criminalization of the non-consensual sharing of images.

I would have liked to see that bill split in order for the piece that's positive to progress on its own in a way which I think everybody agrees with, that this is a really important provision to have in there and to criminalize directly, because there are no other laws that can do what that provision does, and it was really necessary to get through. I am concerned that the entire piece of legislation will be bogged down in litigation as it goes forward. I would have liked to see the provisions that probably will violate rights to privacy separated and to have a separate debate.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** If you could make a recommendation to the committee regarding cyberbullying, what would it be?

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** There are a lot of recommendations in our report. I'm happy to send it to the committee, and I will do that.

There is probably one I would draw the committee's attention to, if that's your question. It is the creation of a new position that is funded through Status of Women Canada but is independent from government. It would be responsible for examining and doing law reform recommendations and presenting to Parliament on what those reforms would look like. It would also think more deeply about how we regulate the Internet in a way that doesn't infringe on privacy and doesn't restrict the creative potential of the Internet, which is great and vast, and also the significance of the Internet in young people's lives. At the same time it would figure out a way to keep it safe and to regulate social media and to regulate advertisers, for example, on online comment spaces in a way that allows women to have freedom of expression in the same way that men have on the Internet.

It is important to look at this issue not from a perspective of how much we can restrict freedom of speech but how we can make the Internet a safe space for women to have freedom of speech.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you.

**Ms. Steacy of CASAC,** you mentioned that the criminal justice response to rape is unacceptable. Do you have suggestions for change for this committee?

**Ms. Lisa Steacy:** One thing I tried to point out in my presentation was that the law, largely thanks to the work of women and women's groups, actually is a pretty good law with regard to consent and what rape is. Unfortunately, the recommendation would be an acknowledgement that the vast majority of reports of sexual assaults are lost or deemed unfounded at the initial police level, so something has to change about the way that police respond to women's initial reports and they need to conduct swift, thorough, and timely investigations into those reports.

The rape myths we've heard so much about and that pervade the way sexual assault is investigated, prosecuted and defended are probably one of the largest factors that serve to dismiss women when they go forward and speak out about what has happened to them, so, although the Criminal Code definition of consent is very clear, the police, when they're investigating rape, still use the excuse of "he said, she said; we can't prove it", and all of those sorts of things.

I don't know if that is helpful.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I will now give the floor to Ms. O'Neill Gordon for five minutes.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC):** I want to thank all of you for being with us today. We certainly appreciate your words of advice and information as our committee continues to work toward preventing violence against women and learning the best practices.

My first question is for Jocelynn Cook.

In your presentation you mentioned how environmental conditions can affect a woman's brain and can even affect a child's development in later years. I was happy to hear you say that one of the goals of this organization is to increase the education of women on health issues affecting them and their families, which is something we really need to bring to the forefront and to have a special emphasis on.

Could you please provide some initiatives taken to increase the education of women on health issues affecting them and their families? What were some of the initiatives taken?

● (1000)

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook:** The SOGC has a number of really popular websites that we use. We just won an award for our new pregnancy website. We also have a SexualityandU website, a menopause website. We are always creating and updating evidence-based materials to put on those websites to reach women and families about issues related to women's reproductive health.

That's one way we do things: through websites. We have social media; we do Twitter, which I'm not good at. We do conferences and workshops. We're trying to do some more webinars. We have a public education initiative to educate women about reproductive health issues.

One thing I didn't mention that I think is important is we do a lot of work internationally. Our organization has a global health division. We talk a lot about reproductive rights and helping women understand their reproductive rights. We're working as well to integrate reproductive rights material in the Canadian training for obstetrical care that we offer for obstetricians, gynaecologists, family doctors, midwives, and nurses in Canada as well as abroad. That's really important.

We've done something interesting with the SexualityandU website. We targeted a survey on that website for youth to look at: what they feel they need in terms of information around reproductive health and sexuality. We have about 700 responses right now. We are using the data to provide different types of information and in different formats. We do have a lot going on that I didn't touch on.

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon:** That's good to hear. Congratulations on your winnings, and I'm sure there are others like me; I'm not into Twitter.

We certainly appreciate all you have done.

How do you feel about the overall outcomes? Are all of them positive? I know with youth, it's really good.

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook:** Yes, and I think that the changing... Again the web and the whole cyberspace issues that have been talked about today, I think with a lot of cultural issues that we're experiencing related to women's reproductive health, we're trying to understand how we work best with care providers and provide them with training opportunities and the tools and the resources they need to be able to do their job well. We reach out to women through all the different emerging media and ways that are possible.

So I think so. I think we've had great feedback. There are things we can always do differently, but the more we understand issues and how they affect women's reproductive health, I think through research and through evidence, the more we can do to effectively improve outcomes. We're committed to that.

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon:** The more you have out there, the more helpful it is for women. They have a place to go, which I think is very good.

Also the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada is known to have two global initiatives: the aboriginal health initiative and to advance culturally safe health and healing for aboriginal women. What steps have been taken to meet initiatives in this area as well?

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook:** We have a very active membership and a committee on aboriginal health initiatives. They've developed guidelines for working with aboriginal women, which I didn't bring today but I'm happy to provide. They spent a couple of years developing best practices for working specifically with aboriginal women. Right now they're starting to look at things related to mental health issues, to gestational diabetes and risk factors for that. They have a number of initiatives that are very specific to the field of aboriginal health.

•(1005)

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon:** That's good.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much. That was very interesting.

Ms. Ashton, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Dr. Cook, I was very interested in the work that you and your organization do to promote reproductive health, which is obviously a critical issue linked to women's health. As you may know, it has also been difficult to make sure there's federal funding both here at home, but more importantly abroad. Sadly we have a very narrow prescription from this government on what reproductive health includes, and sadly, too many times it excludes access to abortion and access to information on abortion. We know that the lack of access is also intertwined with the violence women face.

I'm wondering if you could speak to your perspective on social determinants which has come out through your presentation. Could you speak to the role of poverty when it comes to the barriers that women face, the propensity to face violence as a result of those marginalized situations and how that ultimately affects their health? Do we need to address poverty when we talk about violence against women?

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook:** Yes. I think that relationship between poverty, homelessness, and violence came out in some other presentations. We know that the data show that socio-economic status in general has a number of risk factors that include things that would put women at unique risk for violence: substance abuse, homelessness, poverty. As well, effective support systems and access to services and service delivery I think are really important.

I think from everybody's perspective, as was discussed, poverty is very, very linked in terms of putting women in situations where they're at risk not only for violence but also for not being able to access some supports and services that may be available because of the whole issue of poverty itself and because of the context they might be experiencing and living, such as homelessness, not being able to access legal aid, and things like that.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

Ms. Govender, I'd like to turn to you once again. You spoke about, and my colleague had an opportunity to outline, the really groundbreaking work that West Coast LEAF has done on cybermisogyny and the very clear reality that too many young women in our country face. I mean, I work in an institution here, where the average age is much older than what would be considered young. Often we express this sort of awe at, "Well, what is cybermisogyny? What is going on online that we don't understand?" Somehow we don't actually get to what is going on. Often, in fact, we resort to using words like "bullying" instead of talking about misogyny or harassment, particularly sexual harassment, and also sexual violence.

I'm wondering if you could speak to how important it is to take cybermisogyny seriously. Does it in fact mean addressing some of the systemic inequality that's faced by women, not looking at it as just a one-off phenomenon that we see online? Is it in fact a reflection of the kind of inequality that young women face in their daily lives? Is it something that we need to take seriously and deal with?

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** Absolutely we need to take it seriously. Hate, harassment, sexism—it's nothing new. Certainly that's not changed. The fact that it's there has not changed with the advent of the Internet age. What is new is the level of anonymity that can be found online and the kind of licence, the free licence, to speak without immediate reaction.

When you look online now, you can see a level of vitriol that you don't see elsewhere in life very often. That vitriol is very often directed against women, people of colour, immigrants, and so on, and against LGBTQ individuals as well, which is another key area. I think it's really important to name those sources, those sociological sources of hatred, if I can say it that way, in order to figure out how to address it. If we just call it bullying, we obscure what's really happening and we obscure the solutions that we need to have in order to address this issue.

I think it might help to ground this discussion a little bit. I talked a little bit about it in my opening, but what we're talking about here is a whole crop of sites called revenge porn sites. These are sites where jilted ex-boyfriends, to use that phrase, might post a picture that a woman might have shared with him consensually, or a girl might have shared with him consensually, but who did not consent to having it posted online. There are stories in the news of—

• (1010)

**The Chair:** You can continue, but please finish up, as I have to move on.

Go ahead and finish, please.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** Sure.

I was just going to provide the example of stories in which women's pictures are posted with their details. The cyber-violence turns into real violence when their addresses, their social insurance numbers, and their telephone numbers are posted online.

I just wanted to provide one example of how this plays out.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I'm sorry for the interruption.  
[Translation]

Ms. Ambler, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.  
[English]

**Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC):** Thank you to all of you for being here today and for your wonderful presentations.

I have what I think might be a fairly quick question for you, Dr. Cook.

I was wondering when you were talking, what it is that makes pregnancy a particularly vulnerable time for women. Does it have something to do with a power imbalance? Is it jealousy issues? I'm just wondering.

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook:** Being a scientist, I think it's all estrogen.

There is the emotional stress of being pregnant, worrying about your pregnancy outcome, worrying about the developing baby, that you're providing all of the best tools for this little developing baby to be born healthy.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** What is it about that that makes her more likely to be abused in that time period?

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook:** There is mixed data on that. Sometimes the physical abuse might switch to emotional abuse or more physiological abuse. There's data that shows that. There's also data that shows there could be escalated abuse, both physical and emotional abuse. The studies aren't 100% conclusive on that.

There could be issues related to jealousy, related to changing body structure, related to women, the perception that women during pregnancy may not be able to do all of the things they could do previously physically. I think it's probably very complex and it's different in different situations. Women during pregnancy are also on an emotional roller coaster, I guess, for lack of a better term. That just happens to be the physiological effects of all the changes in hormones. I think all of those things together make women vulnerable.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** You spoke about the role of physicians. We've talked in other studies about the fact that when doctors go to school, they learn about physiology, but they don't learn about emotions. They don't learn about issues like violence. They don't learn about eating disorders, behavioural problems, nutrition, a whole bunch of things that aren't included in the medical school curriculum.

Would you say that some aspect of violence against women be something that physicians should be more aware of or be able to deal with, or maybe that's just not what they're supposed to do? Which side do you land on that issue?

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook:** The medical school curriculum is really hard to influence. We tried to influence it before related to alcohol use during pregnancy, and it was very difficult.

Health professional organizations like the College of Family Physicians Canada, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, nursing, midwives, have their own continuing medical education curricula. They provide training for their members based on what they think the members need and what the members actually identify that they need.

That's a really great opportunity to be able to develop curricula or training courses or specialty courses related to violence against women, around risk factors, roles of health providers, accessing resources, how you help women do this. Health professionals have to take a certain number of credits for their continuing medical education, so I think that would be a great way to introduce the practicalities that are current and evidence-based in terms of some of those courses. The reproductive rights piece might be a great subject for that as well. I think that's a great way to do that.

• (1015)

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** Wonderful. Thank you.

Lisa Steacy, I'm wondering if you could elaborate on your second point. You focused most of your comments, because of time constraints, on the responsibility of the criminal justice system to respond to sexual assault and violence against women. Your second point was about men consulting with.... I'm sorry, I was writing quickly, but I didn't quite catch it. I thought I'd give you the opportunity to talk about your second point.

**Ms. Lisa Steacy:** The second thing I was trying to draw attention to was something that I mentioned that was affirmed by the largest ever global study into violence against women. It's that the independent women's movement and the mobilization of feminists worldwide has been hugely influential in policy change regarding violence against women. Independent women's groups and the independent women's movement are not funded to meet, coordinate, or advise the government, never mind operate in the first place. For example, CASAC has no operational funding, no national staff, no travel budget, no lobbying budget, no funding whatsoever, and we still do the best we can to do the work that we do, but our capacity to do it has been drastically reduced from back in the 1980s and 1990s when we regularly were invited to meet with and advise the government, as well as each other as the women's movement, as to what needed to happen in order to prevent violence against women and advance women's equality.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Steacy.

[Translation]

I will now give the floor to Ms. Crockatt for five minutes.

[English]

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Thank you very much to all of our witnesses today.

It is very appropriate that we are discussing this topic right now in the 16 days of activism against gender violence. I think our minister has shown a lot of leadership in speaking out. We've talked about awareness today and I think it is very important that we state openly that violence against women and girls is not okay. We do not accept that. That's one of the key starting points for all of us to get where we want to go.

One of the things I worry about.... I was a founding member of a sexual assault centre in Alberta and my mom started one of the first women's shelters for abused women in Alberta. Hers was in the 1970s; ours was in the 1980s. I worry sometimes that when we get together we talk about the most basic issues instead of maybe capitalizing on the best things that are happening to move us forward, so that we can keep focusing on how we move the ball forward. Which things are working? We have been recognizing these problems and we want to collect our gains here and see what we've got that's moving forward and working.

I was very pleased to hear the comments from LEAF about cyberbullying. I think the cyberbullying legislation is one of the new fields we're moving forward in. I think that we have programs for immigrant women now, where they're receiving information about what the rules are in Canada. Some of those programs are for immigrant men who have no idea that they can't come to Canada and engage in family violence, that it is not acceptable here.

I'm wondering if we can talk about some of those things that we've collected knowledge on, where we really think we are moving forward. I thought maybe I would talk to Ann. First of all, on #NOTokay, do you think we are making any gains in changing attitudes, and what are the best practices you've found?

• (1020)

**Ms. Ann Decter:** I think we have made some gains in changing attitudes. Certainly, since I was young there's no doubt there has been quite a bit of movement from my examples cited about Margaret Mitchell being laughed at in the House of Commons in the 1980s when she talked about domestic violence, and now domestic violence is more than recognized. We have programs on it. People know it's wrong. They know it's a crime. It took time for women to establish that it was a crime, but we still have a long way to go. We have areas, such as when you're talking about cybermisogyny, where there have been huge advances in the opposite direction, the introduction of anonymity in terms of attacks, those kinds of things.

When we did our launch of #NOTokay, the other day we had with us Dianne Woloschuk who is the president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation. She said that parents and teachers cannot cope with the overwhelming messages about violence against women and misogyny that are coming out of social media, video games, music videos. They really need a way to work with that. That is one place where we hope that #NOTokay will be useful.

We're asking people, when they see things that promote violence against women or attack women, that they call them out online by saying it is not okay. We're hoping it will be a simple tool that moves people from letting things ride to actually expressing it when they feel it's not okay. I think that's a bit of a crucial thing, particularly with men and boys who tend to go with peer behaviour, rather than being the one who disrupts what's going on. I think we certainly see that on campuses. We really need those guys to be able to say they're not okay with this.

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** Were you at all motivated by, or were you aware of the cyberbullying initiative that Laureen Harper and Minister James Moore launched in 2013? Did that make any impact on you with respect to launching your own this year?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** Yes. Social media cuts two ways. On the one hand, there is all of the cybermisogyny that goes on; on the other hand, it's a way by which you can reach young people at relatively little cost. As we saw with the hashtag "been raped never reported", people can express what's going on with them in ways that they can control.

It's a tool, and we're trying to turn that tool in the direction of decreasing violence against women and girls.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Your time is up already. Time sure flies.

[Translation]

We will now move to Ms. Duncan for five minutes.

[English]

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** I'm just looking for a yes or a no answer right now.

Ms. Decter, were you consulted on the minister's new action plan on family violence?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** Not that I am aware of, no, we weren't.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you.

I'll put the same question to LEAF and to CASAC.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** I'm sorry, for some reason we're having trouble hearing you. Did you ask whether we were consulted?

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Yes. Could you tell me whether you were consulted on the minister's new action plan on family violence? I'm just looking for a yes or a no.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** West Coast LEAF was not.

**Ms. Lisa Steacy:** Neither was the Canadian—

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Neither was CASAC?

**Ms. Lisa Steacy:** No.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you, all.

Ms. Govender, you spoke of a lack of national standards for legal aid. If you could make a specific recommendation to this committee about what you would like to see in the report, what would it be with respect to legal aid? Give as much detail as you can, please.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** I would like to see a return to the time—it was in the nineties, I believe, and I don't have the date—when the federal government gave funding to provincial legal aid plans through tied transfer payments, transfer payments with strings attached.

Basically that is a funding request. It would be great to see legal aid as a key piece of a national action plan on violence against women, to say that this is essential for ensuring that women can leave relationships safely and that women and children have their best interests met upon the breakdown of abusive relationships.

That's what I would like to see, and in particular in the areas of family law. It is an area that is often underserved, because it's not seen to have constitutional protections in the way that criminal law has. It needs specific consideration. It needs the federal government to say that family law is a priority.

Thank you.

• (1025)

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you, Ms. Govender.

I'm going to pick up on that. When I talk to our local shelters, one of their frustrations is with respect to areas for improvement regarding family law. Would you like to make any recommendations to the committee regarding this?

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** There are so many recommendations on improvements to family law. Most of my recommendations would

probably go to the provinces rather than to areas within the jurisdiction of the federal government.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Is there a recommendation to the federal government that you would like to see?

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** I can't think of anything particular on the Divorce Act off the top of my head, but I can say that the federal government could talk about enforcement of the Family Law Act. For B.C. it's the Family Law Act; in other provinces it's called other things.

Family law is meaningless without the means to enforce it, so it becomes a tool for the rich. Because it's a civil action in civil law, you can only enforce it if you can go to court, or if you can have a lawyer to enforce it. That's where the federal government has a direct role to play.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you so much.

Now I'll go to Ms. Steacy on the topic of sexual assault reporting. Are there best practices for encouraging women to come forward?

**Ms. Lisa Steacy:** Is it to come forward specifically to report to the police? Is that what you're asking?

Unfortunately, the continued failure to investigate and prosecute sexual assaults adequately reinforces women's reluctance to report, so it's almost a self-perpetuating system. I think we would need to hear an explicit and deliberate commitment from all levels of government, justice departments, and police forces that they're going to treat crimes of sexual assault and violence against women seriously, that they're going to take women's reports as evidence in and of themselves, and that they're going to investigate them and prosecute them with the same diligence as they do other crimes.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you.

From a health perspective, Dr. Cook, where are the weaknesses in the response to victims of domestic violence? Where can we do better?

**Dr. Jocelynn Cook:** I think we can do better, as I suggested, with helping the health providers understand the risk factors, the signs and symptoms, the health outcome implications, and what they can do in their role to be helpful—mostly navigating the system, knowing what resources are out there, knowing the ability and feasibility of accessing those resources, and helping their office staff to be trained in all of those areas as well, and providing helpful information to women.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Young, the floor is yours. You have seven minutes.

[English]

**Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC):** I want to thank you all for your extensive information and also for the wonderful work that you're doing, obviously, in B.C. Hello, B.C. colleagues.

This question is for Ann Decter.

I was heavily involved in the building of Crabtree Corner in Vancouver, which is the YWCA Vancouver. I was on the board of the YWCA Vancouver for a number of years. I see that as a model for best practices, because in one building we have residential housing, programs and services, even a garden on the roof to grow food, and all of that sort of thing. There's a communal kitchen. It just goes on in terms of it being an integrated, holistic service centre.

Perhaps you could expand a bit on that, Ms. Decter, and share with us whether that is a best practice, because we didn't hear that today. What can you tell us about it in terms of how we can possibly share that model with the rest of Canada?

● (1030)

**Ms. Ann Decter:** It's basically a supportive housing model. It is housing young women and it is also providing the support services around it. It's long-term housing. It's not an emergency shelter. I think they've come through emergency shelter to there. On site it has the kind of support services that I talked about shelters having, such as counselling, support for education. I believe there's a small child-care centre on the top floor where women who have children can have their children taken care of on site. They're fully supported to pursue their education or get work, but really to get back on their feet and to live in a safe environment at the same time. We would definitely recommend that.

YWCA Vancouver has another excellent program which is a live-in program for pregnant teenage girls. They can live there and have their babies. They stay there for about 18 months, I think, after they have their children, and they attend high school at the same time. It's basically on site with a high school.

These kinds of services can support young women and mothers to get through the periods in their lives when they are in crisis and then out into the community where they can live safely with the skills they need.

**Ms. Wai Young:** We talked about a number of different programs, obviously, and services throughout Canada, including research, etc. I'm kind of intrigued by what my colleague, Joan Crockatt, was asking in the sense that her mother founded a shelter in the 1980s and she founded one more recently. Have we really moved ahead in terms of our best practices? Do we now sort of know, as a country and as a society, what works? How do we take that knowledge and apply it so that organizations and people who want to work in the sector can do more effective work? I was involved in, for example, the Mennonite Central Committee and numerous other non-profit organizations where they have shelters, where they provide all kinds of programs and services, but they may not be knowledgeable about the best practices to be effective.

Can you comment on that? That question is for all of you. I'd really love a quick comment from all of you on that.

**Ms. Ann Decter:** One thing I would say is, I think the best practices shift as our work moves forward. If you see the stats with regard to shelters, for example—that's part of our area of expertise, as we have 18 shelters across the country in six provinces and two territories—if you have two-thirds of women who are just accessing shelters once, then you know those women have made a change in their lives and are not getting stuck in the same situation, which is pretty much the standard. What I said about seeing in some other

provinces a difference in the shelter population than 10 or 20 years ago, with more women with mental health and addiction issues coming to the shelters for abused women.... It's anecdotal, but we hear this from shelter workers. That population wasn't trying to access those shelters before and those shelters were not trying to get their doors open. They were saying, "This needs to be a safe and quiet space and we can't cope with you." I think that shift in population shows that other women are finding other ways out of violence or that violence is being prevented. Again, it needs a study, but that's anecdotal.

**Ms. Wai Young:** I'll just make a quick shift there.

Last year we passed Bill S-2, which gave matrimonial and property rights to women who were experiencing violence or whatever on reserve. There had been a gap in legislation. What we did with that, which I think was very commendable, was to say that these women and children don't have to leave their homes to go to a shelter. In fact the abusive man has to leave. These people can stay in their homes and stay in their schools and stay in their community, etc., which I think is far better. Would you agree with that? Is that what I'm hearing you say?

**Ms. Ann Decter:** We would much rather see women not become homeless due to violence, absolutely.

**Ms. Wai Young:** Exactly, but you did not support Bill S-2 though, so that was interesting.

**Ms. Ann Decter:** There were issues with Bill S-2.

**Ms. Wai Young:** Anyway, the point is that it is now in place and that gives us a step forward in terms of another best practice. Is that correct, in the sense that we now have something that means women can stay in their home? Given the high incidence of aboriginal women being on the streets—certainly I saw them when I worked in the downtown eastside in Vancouver with garbage bags full of clothes and stuff like that—I felt that was a huge step ahead.

I see some nodding. Are there any comments from you folks as well? How are we going to see Bill S-2 play out? Are we going to see that women are going to get to stay in their homes?

● (1035)

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** Actually I just wanted to speak to your previous question. You said you wanted to hear from us about whether we thought progress had been made and how we make further change. I want to make two points.

One is that I think there has been some progress made in silos. In order to protect women, one of the key pieces that needs to come together is a coordinated response. That's come out over and over again in report after report. There is significant work that needs to be done on coordinating a response, for example, between the criminal justice system, the family law system, the child protection system, and legal aid, all these things working together. That's one point.

The other one is that we do know much of what we need to do. There have been reports across the country. There have been, for example, two key ones that come to mind. One is the Lee inquiry in B.C. That was a man who murdered his wife, his child, and his wife's family. There was a severe lack of coordinated response in that case. The second is the missing and murdered women report from Commissioner Wally Oppal in B.C. Both of them gave lots of recommendations that have not been implemented. That is a really key piece that I'd love to see in the report developing from this study.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Ashton, the floor is yours. You have seven minutes.

[English]

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Ms. Decter, I also want to applaud you and the YWCA for launching the #NOTokay campaign. I understand that it did go viral. I see it used very often. I've seen it being used very often to speak to the range of triggers that women see and are obviously not okay.

I'm wondering if you could speak a bit, as a number of our witnesses have spoken, about the importance around education on consent. In the last couple of weeks I've spoken about this numerous times in relation to what we're dealing with here in Parliament: allegations of sexual harassment and even assault. I found that often, both in interacting with the media in interviews and even among colleagues, including well-meaning colleagues, there is a very vague or unclear understanding of consent. It just makes me think of how important it is to have broad-based education and awareness.

We heard of success stories in the schools, and we know of work on campuses, but we know also how important it is in our very society and in reaching out to folks who are older than those in high school or junior high and engaging them using this kind of language going forward.

**Ms. Ann Decter:** Absolutely.

First I will say that it is not my area of expertise. I would definitely bow to the two people we have from B.C. for more detailed expertise on this.

But it would definitely seem that the media and the general public are lacking in understanding of explicit continuing consent to sexual activity. That's not surprising, given the language. What exactly does that mean?

You see in the United States a lot campuses are moving to "yes means yes", which is a simpler way of saying that you need a continual "yes" for what is going on. We really do need a lot of education around that.

On the one hand, there's a lot of backlash going on from people who don't even understand that what they're saying is backlash. But the prioritizing, for example, on Parliament Hill of what the women MPs have to say about the situation right now is a good thing. That's a start. That's where all women's services begin, in listening to women and listening to their stories.

Education on consent is key. I didn't know about B.C. and West Coast LEAF's education for grades 7 and 8, but I think we need to go to curriculum. It should be in the health curriculum for young people, girls and boys, to learn exactly what consent is, so they come out of school with an understanding of explicit continuing consent to sexual activity.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

Mrs. Govender, I'm wondering if you could speak to where we are on this. Is there a role for the federal government to support this kind of education? Again this is not just in terms of in our educational institutions, but also in the broader society, reaching out to folks who are older than those whom you might work with. I'm wondering if you could speak a bit to that.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** Absolutely there's a role. I don't want to take sole credit for running an education program. There are other really important education programs run across the country by our sister organization, LEAF national. There's a project actually right now that is being run by the Girls Action Foundation. It's looking at best practices on education, not simply around the law of consent, but around preventing Internet partner violence.

There are important initiatives taking place, but they're taking place in the non-profit sector, and it would be great to see those initiatives also taking place in the public sector and in universities across the country.

• (1040)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you very much.

Mrs. Govender, we've seen record cuts in terms of women's programming across the country. In fact we know especially national LEAF has suffered a great deal as a result of these deep cuts. I'm wondering if you think it's important that the federal government support advocacy and put that kind of advocacy focus on things like education around consent.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** It's really a significant point, the lack of funding across the country for civil society that works on human rights issues and more particularly on women's issues. You can see the lack of national women's organizations. There are very few left. That didn't use to be the case. This is important for protecting women's interests. It's really important that the federal government move into this space, but it's also really important that the federal government support dissenting voices. That's what makes a healthy democracy and it's what protects minorities and protects vulnerable people, protects women. I think that's a really key point to come out of this study.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

Mrs. Govender, you've done some excellent work on the subject of the violence that women with disabilities face. I'm wondering if you could speak a bit to recommendations that we need to take forward on this front.

**Ms. Kasari Govender:** We recently produced a report called “Able Mothers: The intersection of parenting, disability and the law”, and I’m happy to send that to the committee. There are some recommendations for the federal government. Throughout this report there are recommendations about providing access to justice. There are also some key issues around housing in this report, housing, as you can imagine, that’s adapted for women to be able to parent when they have certain limitations, physical limitations, for example. It’s really important that they’re not displaced from that housing because there’s a lot of work that goes into adapting housing. That’s one recommendation.

I’m also happy to send the report out for the other recommendations and specifically highlight the recommendations for the federal government.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Any comments or add-ons that you would like to send, I would invite you to send to the clerk.

I would like to thank very much our guests here in Ottawa, Dr. Cook and Ms. Decter, and particularly the people in Vancouver, who I just realized had to get up fairly early to be with us. Thank you very much for your input to this very important study.

[*Translation*]

Many thanks to all the members of the committee.

We will meet again on Tuesday, at the same time. Three witnesses have confirmed that they will attend the meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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