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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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● (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): Hello.

I would like to welcome my colleagues.

[*English*]

We're starting again into our discussion about cyber-bullying. Today we are lucky to have with us from the Centre for Youth Crime Prevention in the RCMP, Peter Payne, officer in charge of the National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre; and Kimberly Taplin, director of the National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services. We also have from Atwater Library and Computer Centre, Shanly Dixon, educator and researcher from the digital literacy project.

We'll have each of them speak for 10 minutes, and then we'll start our usual rounds of questioning.

We'll start off with Ms. Taplin.

Inspector Kimberly Taplin (Director, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services, Centre for Youth Crime Prevention - RCMP): Madam Chair, members of the committee, let me first thank you for inviting the RCMP to appear at your committee meeting today.

My name is Inspector Kim Taplin, and I'm the director of the RCMP's national aboriginal policing and crime prevention services. I am joined today by Inspector Peter Payne, and it's Peter's mandate as the officer in charge of the National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre to reduce the vulnerability of children to Internet-facilitated sexual exploitation by identifying victimized children, to investigate and assist in the prosecution of sexual offenders, and to strengthen the capacity of municipal, territorial, provincial, federal, and international police agencies through training, research, and investigative support.

Youth is a strategic priority of the RCMP, and we are ever mindful of the rapidly evolving role the Internet and technology play in the daily lives of Canadian youth. Recognizing that education and prevention are key to eliminating exploitation and violence, I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the range of important cybercrime prevention programs and initiatives that the RCMP supports through the RCMP national youth services Centre for Youth Crime Prevention.

The Centre for Youth Crime Prevention is the RCMP's main online, youth-related hub providing support for persons working with youth, as well as youth themselves, parents, and front-line police officers. The website contains a variety of tools and resources to effectively engage youth on crime and victimization issues, and highlights the four main youth priority issues of the RCMP national youth strategy. These are bullying and cyber-bullying, intimate partner violence, drugs and alcohol abuse, and youth radicalization to violence.

These priority issues were identified after we analyzed annual youth crime statistics, reviewed detachment performance plans and priorities, consulted with our partners, conducted a scan of high-profile media stories involving youth, and, most importantly, consulted with youth themselves.

For each of the priority issues, lesson plans, presentations, fact sheets, self-assessments, videos, and interactive games are developed. They are created using youth-appropriate language and are designed to attract the attention of youth.

The RCMP works closely with its partners to ensure that the information shared is accurate and reflective of the current social environment. Each year, several social media campaigns aimed at youth audiences are delivered. These campaigns are designed to provide education and awareness, and to empower youth to take action in their communities.

With respect to cyber-violence, offences of cyber-violence include a range of sophisticated crimes that exploit technology through computer networks, such as cyber-bullying and online child sexual exploitation. As people increasingly live their lives connected to the web, this greater connectivity has allowed for greater anonymity, increased opportunities to engage in risky online behaviours, and decreased accountability. The Internet, an expanding technological innovation, puts children at greater risk as it often lowers inhibitions online and provides offenders greater access to unsupervised children.

To give you some idea of scale, in 2015, the National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre received 14,951 complaints, reports, and requests for assistance—a 146% increase since 2011. As of September of this year, the National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre had already received over 19,000 reports.

Compounding the ever-increasing volume of reports, is the challenge to law enforcement of increasing technological sophistication among offenders. Offenders are often one step ahead when it comes to technology, as they use encryption and anonymization techniques, for example. Using these tools, offenders can often evade police more successfully, significantly complicating investigations.

● (1535)

The Centre for Youth Crime Prevention approaches cyber-violence by focusing on providing education and awareness of cyber-bullying, and promoting the development of positive and healthy relationships. As I previously mentioned, the Centre for Youth Crime Prevention leads and supports several social media campaigns annually.

This past February, the RCMP partnered with the Canadian Women's Foundation to support the #HealthyLove campaign. This month-long social media campaign encouraged young people to publicly recognize one of the 14 principles of a healthy relationship. These included, for example: I will share my feelings; I will be truthful; I will be open to compromise. This campaign promotes the idea that healthy relationships should always be free of violence. In addition to #HealthyLove, a public service announcement with NHL hockey player Jordin Tootoo was recently released, encouraging young men and boys to end violence against women.

The RCMP also currently runs a campaign called BullyText. Launched during last year's Bullying Awareness Week, BullyText is a tool to engage youth using text messaging. The tool features a variety of bullying scenarios. The choices youth make while texting on a cellphone determine how the scenarios play out with their friends and others in the game. By simply texting the word “BULLY” to 38383, one can launch the tool. To date, it has been used by teachers, police officers, and others working with youth. If there is time afterward, and you would like, I can you walk you through this game.

One of the main goals of the Centre for Youth Crime Prevention is to reach youth in classrooms, grabbing their attention while they are in a learning environment. Since our school resource officers are often asked to do presentations to classrooms on a variety of youth-related topics, the RCMPTalks initiative was developed. RCMPTalks is a series of 90-minute live and interactive video conferences that offer advice and guidance on important issues, such as bullying, cyber-bullying, and healthy relationships. Each conversation allows students from up to six different classrooms across Canada to participate. Students are encouraged to interact with one another via a secure virtual classroom and on social media. A motivational speaker leads the conversation with his or her personal story, and empowers student to take action and stand up to the issues at hand. To date, we've hosted six RCMPTalks sessions.

One of the main strengths of the Centre for Youth Crime Prevention is a vast network of subject-matter experts and partnership organizations with which it is connected. The RCMP works very closely with a variety of organizations whose mandates focus on youth-related issues, including violence toward women and girls. These valuable connections assist us in delivering evidence-based products and services. Due to the impressive connections we have developed over the years, we are able to maintain the Ask an Expert tool on our website. Ask an Expert provides the opportunity to ask a police officer or a person in a police-related role questions on youth crime and victimization issues anonymously, via email. Though Ask an Expert is not a reporting tool, we do connect youth who have victimization concerns to their local police department or RCMP detachment, and encourage them to speak to agencies like Kids Help Phone or to report child exploitation concerns to Cybertip.ca.

With all the activities that are delivered by the Centre for Youth Crime Prevention, we recognize that it is valuable to hear the youth perspective. Since 2010, the RCMP national youth advisory committee, composed of youth from across Canada between the ages of 13 and 18, has provided us with insight into what youth are thinking and feeling on issues they are facing, including those of cyber-violence and intimate-partner violence. Connected via a private Facebook group, youth are engaged on a bi-weekly basis to provide their thoughts on activities, projects, and ideas of the Centre for Youth Crime Prevention. The responses feed into our national youth strategy, as well as other RCMP policies, programs, and procedures that may impact youth. On a quarterly basis, we publish an internal “Youth Trends Report”. The “Youth Trends Report” is a collection of open-source information of the most up-to-date trends that youth are engaging in. This may include the latest smartphone apps, popular online lingo, or the coolest movies, songs, or videos that are influencing youth.

● (1540)

Thank you once again for inviting me to speak today, and I welcome any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you. That was excellent.

I'll now go to Ms. Dixon for 10 minutes.

Ms. Shanly Dixon (Educator and Researcher, Digital Literacy Project, Atwater Library and Computer Centre): Thank you so much for inviting me to speak today. It's really an honour to be here with you.

One of the basic things we do at the Cyber-violence Prevention Project is to try to get schools and institutions to define cyber-violence, and to implement a policy with clear procedures and processes in place, as well as resources. When we try to get people to name cyber-violence and put it into their anti-harassment policies or student handbooks, and so on, we often hear “Well, it happened online, so it's not really real” or “It didn't happen on campus, so it's not our problem.” We need to begin with the acknowledgement that cyber-violence directed at girls and young women is inextricably linked to off-line violence.

For many of us today, and particularly for youth, there's no divide between online and off-line. Virtual spaces pervade every aspect of life as we are continuously connected to the Internet, to our online communities, and to each other. As a result, the physical, psychological, emotional, and financial consequences of an online experience can be profound. They are experienced both online and off-line. In relation to this, online violence normalizes off-line violence. Being immersed in a digital culture that portrays sexualized violence, misogyny, the objectification of women, hypersexualization of girls, and discrimination against LGBT-plus and gender-nonconforming people as normal, as entertainment, or even as humour makes those representations or beliefs seem mainstream, palatable, or even acceptable in off-line environments.

The online environments and communities we interact in are important, and they have profound implications for our off-line lives. Defining cyber-violence and policy may seem like such a basic thing, but just having that definition in a student handbook or a policy allows women to use it as a tool to get help and to say “This is happening to me. It's not acceptable. I need help to address it.”

As technology becomes more pervasive in our everyday lives, and as designers and developers seek to make online interactions more powerful, meaningful, and realistic, it's critical to engage in concrete, effective initiatives to ensure that those technologies are developed and integrated into our lives in ethical ways.

Cyber-violence is similar to other forms of violence in that it exists along a continuum, from the very broad social impacts to the more personal, individual impacts. At one end of the continuum, there might be the hypersexualization and objectification of girls and women in online spaces through popular culture, video games, and pornography, and then more individually focused acts of violence, such as threats and harassment, victim-blaming, revenge porn, stalking, luring, and grooming. The manifestations go on and on. In our research and our work with young people, we see them.

While all manifestations of cyber-violence have negative impacts, it's crucial to engage in research that will contribute to drafting strategies that are nuanced and focused enough to be effective. Specific interventions need to be developed, depending upon where along the continuum you're choosing to target. For example, an intervention that brought video game industry and ICT communities together to discuss preventing and eliminating hypersexualization and objectification of women, or the gratuitous representation of sexual violence for entertainment would be addressing a different end of the continuum than would knowledge mobilization with girls around grooming and luring, or providing policies, resources, and support to girls who are experiencing cyber-violence.

This entails making decisions about where we need to implement legislation, where we need policy, where we need educational initiatives or knowledge mobilization, and where we need to provide support and resources for those experiencing cyber-violence.

To do all of this, we need to engage in more qualitative research to create strategies that both are effective and make sense to the young people who are on the front lines of the issue. As someone who has worked on research projects both within academia and in community, I can say that those things are very different approaches when you're working with girls and digital culture, with academics, or with community projects.

I think we need to create opportunities to combine the strengths of both those perspectives, bringing academia together with community organizations and law enforcement, to engage in research, and to develop strategies collaboratively, while focusing on and getting the voices of girls and the people who are on the front lines of those issues.

Cultural and socio-economic divides are emerging in response to digital divides. Through our digital literacy initiatives, I have gone into a wide range of schools and community organizations in varied cultural, social, and economic contexts. I have begun to realize that the Internet is not the same for everyone. In organizations where there's a strong component of high-quality digital literacy education, young people seem to be better able to recognize gendered cyber-violence, and they're better able to navigate the situations in which they find themselves. They still experience cyber-violence. They still struggle with it. They don't like it. They don't necessarily understand it, but they recognize it as a social problem and a systemic issue rather than as a normal, acceptable behaviour that's simply an aspect of everyday life online.

● (1545)

I found that in schools and community organizations where young people have had no, or very limited, digital literacy education, they often spoke about the limits or risks of online spaces rather than the inherent opportunities. We need extensive comprehensive digital literacy education at all levels that denormalizes cyber-violence through a curriculum that helps us understand the economic, social, political, and ethical aspects of digital culture. That might mean incorporating it across disciplines into many aspects of education.

We sometimes see a gap between the ways in which adults see young people's engagement with digital culture and the reality of what young people are experiencing. I include myself in this category. This gap results in challenges with regard to crafting strategies that make sense to young people, as well as in developing and implementing policy and legislation. When young people engage with misogynistic or highly sexualized content, it's typically hidden away from researchers, from parents, and from teachers, and because of the potentially controversial content, it's kept private or secret. When young people run into problems, they often don't go to adults, because they are afraid of being blamed, or they are worried that maybe adults will intervene in ways that would make the situation worse for them.

Girls often express that they feel pressure from the hypersexualization of online culture. We often feel that misogyny is very intensified, and we wonder why this is. One of the things we've noticed in our work is that people who are vulnerable off-line also often seem to be vulnerable online. We notice that young people whose off-line worlds are limited, who are at risk for undereducation and underemployment, and who are confined in their neighbourhoods, are also often confined in their online worlds.

An example of this is that if we consistently access online content that's highly misogynistic or sexually violent, then we risk creating filter bubbles. Our search engine will give us what it predicts we want based upon our previous clicks. In this way we create our own bubble that filters out the information or world views we aren't particularly interested in. This happens not only through algorithms, but also through the individual choices we make, both online and off-line, and the power of our peers to influence the content we consume and produce.

The problem is that filter bubbles tend to isolate us from opposing ideas and broader world views, and we tend to interact with people and communities that share our interests. They echo our perspectives back to us. Sometimes it can become intense, and someone with limited life experience tends to think that this is all there is and there's no way out.

How can we address this issue? We need to increase the skills of those people who lack digital literacy, and work on using technology to help young people consciously seek out varying and divergent world views, to help them critically evaluate information. When I work with communities of at-risk youth who've had adults helping them denormalize gendered cyberviolence and learn to access and then critically evaluate information that interests them, not only are they better able to navigate the online landscape, they're also usually engaging in developing solutions. They're talking about discussing interventions like the bystander approach, how to denormalize gendered cyber-violence, and how to support peers experiencing cyber-violence.

I think we also have to educate industry. There's a potential for change through educating industry about the implications of the spaces they create and engaging developers in conversations about design affordances and the ethical implications of design choices. I think we have to think forward about where technology is going. With the emergence of new technologies, and potentially new manifestations of cyber-violence, no one can predict where it's going or how people are going to adapt to it. With the development of virtual reality technologies, which are becoming increasingly immersive and realistic, we could be facing a whole new set of challenges around gender-based cyber-violence.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to begin our seven-minute rounds of questioning.

We'll start with my colleague, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I'll start with our colleagues from the RCMP.

One of the things that stood out from your remarks, Ms. Taplin, was the proliferation of complaints regarding online cyber-violence or cyber-bullying. I think you said there were around 19,000. It seems as though the number has grown astronomically. Is there a reason for that growth? Is it more normal to report it? Are there more incidents?

● (1550)

Insp Kimberly Taplin: I'm going to defer to my colleague.

Inspector Peter Payne (Officer in Charge, National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre, Centre for Youth Crime Prevention - RCMP): Thank you, Kim.

We see the increase not just strictly around mandatory reporting. In the last year and a half, we've been getting a lot of reports from private industry of online child sexual abuse material being sent to us. That's where a lot of this comes from.

It's not all attributed to that. Since 2014, we've had about 8,500 complaint reports. In 2015, we had just shy of 15,000. Right now, we're around the 19,000 mark. Who knows where that's going to end? I definitely see an upward trend.

Mr. Sean Fraser: As well, you mentioned a number of times during your remarks that you're targeting youth with different educational initiatives and in different programs. Is there a certain age range that you're targeting? Is there a specific number?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: Yes. We're targeting everybody, all youth, but our youth leadership is aimed at youths between the ages of 13 and 18 to input into our—

Mr. Sean Fraser: Is there a specific reason that we start at the age of 13 and not, say, nine or 11?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: I don't have an answer for that. That's the age we've established for consultation to provide us some feedback on the strategies we undertake.

Mr. Sean Fraser: In terms of the efforts you're trying to undertake, are there any tools that would help that you don't currently have, tools that you would need if there were a policy reform, or additional funding that you could target towards something?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: I'm not in a position to comment specifically on legislation. We work with what we have. We create material and work with our partners in order to take advantage of a collective approach.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Still with the RCMP, there's one thing I'm curious about. Do you find that a lot of the incidents of cyber-violence come out of another jurisdiction, internationally, say, or is it, for lack of a better term, mostly homegrown?

Insp Peter Payne: All our reports are international. We receive a good majority of our reports from NCMEC in the States, as well as Cybertip in Canada. We receive very few from the public. Most of the public ones go to Cybertip, but out of all the ones we receive from our partners, namely Cybertip and NCMEC, a good majority of those go internationally.

I can't give you the demographics throughout Canada, but it's well spread out. It's not strictly in any one geographic area. It's coast to coast and it's north to south. It's everywhere.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Are there any tools you can envision that would be useful to help prevent the challenge of these potential perpetrators coming from all over the world or all over the country? Or are we still too early on in this new phase of cyber-violence?

Insp Peter Payne: I wish there were. At this point, though, we continue the efforts with our partners. There's good collaboration with all our law enforcement partners. There's always an ongoing challenge with new technology. We can't keep up with it, but we're trying our best with what we have.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much.

Ms. Dixon, you spoke about the importance of qualitative research and the importance of collaboration between academics and community law enforcement. Is there any existing research that would highlight what we can do now to improve legislation, policy directives, or funding initiatives?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: For the cyber-violence project that Status of Women Canada has just funded, everyone had to submit a needs assessment, and we all did a lot of research on that project. The findings and recommendations from those projects were on a website that Status of Women Canada created, and I think it gives a lot of information, because it's really new research from community organizations.

In my case, I'm a research fellow with Technoculture, Art and Games, so we partnered with my community organization and brought researchers, community, and academia together. I would look there.

Mr. Sean Fraser: That's the starting point for what we know now and what we can do.

Ms. Shanly Dixon: Yes, it's the most recent, on-the-ground, in Canada, and across the country national research.

Mr. Sean Fraser: In terms of experimenting with further qualitative research, is it largely a question of funding calls for proposals or targeting academic institutions and saying that we want them to find out what they can about this? Is there a specific strategy you think would be most effective to get that information out?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: I think it's creating partnerships or grant proposals that require academic institutions to work with community partners, industry partners, and on-the-ground partners. The thing that academia brings is the rigour. We train for years to study and to engage in research, but I think a community brings relationships of trust. You can get into places and meet youth who you might not be able to meet if you are part of an academic research institution. I think those two things together and funding that kind of research are really important in order to understand what's actually happening on the ground.

● (1555)

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, do I have much time left?

The Chair: You have fifty seconds.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'll open it up for an open-ended suggestion, then.

If government could make the biggest change it could make to implement something new that would help reduce instances of cybercrime, is there an item that would be at the top of your list? That's for either of you.

Ms. Shanly Dixon: I would say that on the ground in community organizations when I talk to youth, they often think it's normal and acceptable. I think it's about just getting the word out there to denormalize cyber-violence. This is not everyday behaviour. This is not just growing up online. We have to explain to them that this is not normal. In their lives, they think extreme cyber-violence is normal behaviour.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm sure my time is exhausted by now.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: All right. We'll take it over to my colleague, Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'm actually going to piggyback on that question, because it was an excellent one. I would love to hear your perspective, as well, from point of view of the RCMP.

It's my understanding that it is difficult to find the people who are committing these crimes online, and I'd like to know how we can go about putting legislation in place that would actually equip and empower you to do your jobs more effectively.

Insp Peter Payne: I'll just say right now that we can't really have a hand in legislation. We work as well as we can with our partners. We're making great efforts in some areas, but we realize that it is becoming more difficult to track some of these perpetrators. However, we do manage to get some of them.

To go back to some of the prevention measures, Cybertip.ca has a lot of good prevention measures, including what they call “Cleanfeed”. The public reports certain websites to them that are sharing child sexual exploitation material online, and they block those sites from entering Canada.

Some of those tools and techniques are very effective, so there is some blockage, but unfortunately we can't control all of the Internet, the worldwide web. We cannot accomplish that at this point in time.

Ms. Rachael Harder: In the interest of time, are you saying that our only hope is just to educate the public? Is there nothing that can be done legislatively? Around this table we are legislators. At the end of the day, we're looking to make changes to legislation that is going to empower you to do your job effectively.

Insp Peter Payne: It's not our role to make any legislation. Whatever legislation comes before us, we'll deal with appropriately.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I get that, but it's our job to work with you guys who are on the front lines, so that we're putting legislation in place that actually empowers you. Otherwise, we're just putting in place stupid legislation that's uneducated and could actually end up binding you rather than empowering you. I'm wondering if you guys are up for working with us on this.

Insp Peter Payne: I'm totally open to any ideas that can help us out. Anybody in law enforcement would be willing to assist, but right now, we work with the legislation we have. If I had an answer for you right now, I would give it to you. We work within the needs of the legislation and the policies and laws of the Government of Canada. I really can't give you an answer as to what I would like to see done. We work with what we have before us.

Ms. Rachael Harder: For this question, I'm going to first point to Ms. Dixon.

With regard to the issue of cyber-violence, do you think that perhaps instead of prosecuting the perpetrators, those who are sharing intimate images of others, we could take the route of bringing about a greater normality in society as a whole by teaching young girls and women that they should be proud of their bodies and that it's okay for them to be seen, and to normalize that so that it's no longer associated with shame and guilt and condemnation? Do you think that perhaps we could take education in that direction and that it would be just as effective?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: Absolutely. When I talk to youth, I hear that young girls would love to see that happen. They believe that theoretically, but on the ground that's not the way their lives play out. They're torn between thinking that theoretically they should feel this way and not being able to act this way because of slut shaming, revenge porn, and all of these things.

Some of the most poignant research that came back was from talking to young girls. I was talking to a group of 15-year-old girls and they said, "You know, you have to take it down a notch. If we share an intimate photo, it shouldn't ruin our life. It shouldn't change the way you think of us forever."

I think that is a really important aspect of it. We're all content producers now. We all make things, post things, share things, and I think it's about teaching from the very youngest of ages that the content we produce has ethical implications and creates the environment we operate in. I think we need to teach those kinds of things both from very early on. and in industry, to developers and designers. The content you create has impacts.

● (1600)

Ms. Rachael Harder: In your estimation, when these crimes are committed, should they be prosecuted, or should they just be normalized in society?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: In my opinion, it depends. I think we need research, because we have to draw lines. We're often asking young people what they want from us, what policy they want. They're on the front lines. They're really smart, and they have a lot of knowledge.

When I go into research, I often ask, "What can we do to help you? Where do you think the lines are between policy, legislation and education?" They're very forthcoming about where they want to draw their lines. I think there are incidents in which we absolutely need to prosecute people who perpetrate cyber-violence. For sure there are lines.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I would ask the same question of the RCMP.

Insp Kimberly Taplin: Could you repeat the question?

Ms. Rachael Harder: There's a field of thought that if we just simply normalize the sharing of intimate images by girls and women, then with enough education, it will no longer be seen as shameful. We could take education in that direction. My question is whether, in your estimation, that is the best way. Is that where education should be going, or should it be going in a different direction?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: Through the centre, through the RCMP, we reach out to our youth community and our partners to help us establish the most appropriate educational pieces in outreach. Our consultations with the youth help direct us on the material and the direction that we take with respect to education, awareness, and prevention. I'm not in a position to speak for the youth. As I said, I count heavily on their input to direct us to take the approach they would like us to take that would best meet their needs.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you to the witnesses. Thank you for your work.

I'd like to feel out a little more, on the RCMP side, your sense of the province-to-province situation for victims who are within a municipal or a rural policing situation. Can victims of cyber-violence expect equivalent access to justice or a consistent police response regardless of where they live in the country?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: The answer to that would be yes. The RCMP provides access to all Canadians equally. We also connect citizens to places such as Cybertip.ca. In that way, they have access through the RCMP, certainly, no matter where they are in Canada. I can't speak for other police forces, but I can speak for the RCMP.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: The RCMP only services within a certain area, so do you have any bridging programs or ways to... ? I guess you're saying you're not sure about outside the RCMP. So people who are receiving police services from a municipal force or from a provincial police force might not have the same access to programs they would have if the RCMP serviced them.

● (1605)

Insp Kimberly Taplin: Today I came prepared to speak only on behalf of the RCMP.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Okay. It does sound as though anybody on the front line can get access to your central pool of resources through the program you have in place. A particularly proactive officer in any force anywhere in the country would be able to access the resources and the expertise you've developed.

Insp Kimberly Taplin: Every police officer, parent, and citizen across Canada has access to that website. It is publicly available.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Do you have any sense of the take-up on that, and whether municipal police forces...? Who's tapping into your network? Do you have stats on how much it is being accessed by front-line people outside your immediate service?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: There's no way for us to distinguish inside or outside access, but I do know that, on average, the Centre for Youth Crime Prevention receives 100 unique visits each month. This does not include the number of returning visitors. During the school year we see, obviously, a higher number of visits to the website, and the resources under bullying and cyber-bullying are the most accessed.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: It's good work. I'm encouraged to know that it's there.

Ms. Dixon, can you talk a little more about who your most important partner might be to achieve some of the objectives you're hoping for, which sound like they are particularly in the areas of research and education? Do you have models in which you see particular provincial jurisdictions doing an especially good job of focusing on that, both through universities' research and through the education system, delivering really inspiring programs that we could look at?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: The most obvious one is probably MediaSmarts, which does great work providing digital literacy initiatives. There's an eGirls project, eGirls in democracy, I think, at the University of Ottawa. I think the people from those research groups have already spoken to you. I work with Technoculture, Art and Games, which is a research organization that looks at the gaming industry and that kind of thing, out of Concordia University—

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: If I can interrupt, what I was actually trying to get at was the level of government. As legislators, we're curious as to what falls into provincial and what falls into federal. Do you have any examples of provincial governments that are particularly supporting the kinds of programs you describe?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: No. Actually, I don't have the answer to that.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Are there school boards or public education systems that you would particularly hold up as doing a good job within the classroom?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: It's so new and it's so emerging that I feel when I go into schools—and we're working with a college right now that wants to become a thought leader in this area—it's such a struggle to just even name it, to get people to acknowledge it, to come up with definitions. I can't say that there's one that comes to mind that would be a leader in that area.

We also try to work with the video game industry. It's so new and it's so emerging and there's a lot of resistance, because it opens up a whole can of worms of actual work, putting in harassment policies and things like that. There needs to be a bit more pressure maybe from government to give people incentives to adopt policy around it and to adopt strategies around it.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thanks.

I'm going to return to the RCMP witnesses.

Can you talk with us about conviction rates or how successful you've been at actually prosecuting cases like this?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: You mean cases of child exploitation?

Insp Peter Payne: It's hard to get those numbers. At the national centre we don't get all the feedback from all of our law enforcement partners, including the RCMP, municipal police agencies, and provincial police agencies. The return rate on a lot of our statistics is generally around 25% or 30%. It's an ongoing issue with us, so I can't provide you with those concrete statistics. Your best efforts would probably be Statistics Canada. Of all the complaints we received, I think in 2014 there were 4,000 reports that went out, but I can't tell you exactly what the conviction rate was on those.

● (1610)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Is that something you'd be able to check and send through our clerk, to point us to do a follow-up on paper? Is that possible?

Insp Peter Payne: It will be extremely difficult. We've been dealing with this issue for years and the main issue is the reporting by the other police departments. Once we disseminate the material, it's out of our control what we get back. Once again, your best way forward with that is through Statistics Canada.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

We'll switch over now to Ms. Vandenbeld, for seven minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to thank you for your very informative interventions.

I'd like to pick up on the question about the gaps in the legislation. I understand very well that you don't want to speculate on what legislation in Canada might look like, but are there examples from international jurisdictions, maybe the U.S. or in Europe or other places, of pieces of legislation or regulations, or even just ideas, that you can think of that are being used in other countries by their national police forces that might be relevant and might be something this committee might want to look at as an example?

Insp Peter Payne: In different countries they are able to access the information more quickly than we in Canada can, but we're bound by current legislation.

In some areas or geographic locations, some police agencies are able to get information from ISPs more quickly than in other areas, but that's more of a geographic location area issue. It's not tied to any current legislation. We have 30 days to get information back. In some areas it depends on the relationship they have with the local courts. Some law enforcement agencies will get that back within a couple of days, whereas in other areas there are stricter or tougher court commitments, so it might take 30 days to get it back.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Do you have any ideas?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: My area is prevention and education. I'm not involved in the enforcement in my current capacity.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: You mentioned technology and how the technology is changing so quickly that the encryption and the advances are outpacing the ability to track people down.

Can anything be done in the area of technology research particularly by the federal government that would keep us a little ahead of that? Is there anything we could be doing to make it easier to keep up?

Insp Peter Payne: I wish there were, but the reality is that with the “dark web”, anonymization techniques, encryption, and ongoing technology changes, it's really difficult. We do conduct those investigations, but they are more complex and they take much more time. More resources would certainly help, but with the technology at this point, we do the best we can.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Obviously the Internet doesn't have geographic boundaries, so in working with other jurisdictions, I'm sure you're co-operating in terms of some of the international aspects of this.

Is there more that can be done to help facilitate working together with other jurisdictions around the world?

Insp Peter Payne: Right now, we have a strong partnership with all law enforcement agencies. The good thing about the centre is that we've been in existence since 2004. We've built those partnerships over the years. There's ready access. There's good collaboration on all ends.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I'd like to move to Ms. Dixon.

Your research and the work you're doing is very admirable. I noted the discussion about the public space and how there's a normalization of things that are in the so-called "not real world", the digital and online world, which is very real for a number of these young people.

I am interested, though. You mentioned that young people who are more vulnerable, who are at risk in their day-to-day lives in the real world, in the physical world, are also more vulnerable online. I noted also that you are doing work on national aboriginal policing.

Sorry, Kimberly, this would be a question for you. Would aboriginal youth face greater risks online because they might be more at risk in their day-to-day lives as well?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: I'm not prepared to comment on that today.

That's certainly not an area I've examined for the purposes of this particular committee.

● (1615)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Okay.

Ms. Dixon, you talked about the at-risk youth. Could you elaborate a little further? We have programs. We've heard from previous witnesses that there are programs for at-risk youth, and maybe this could be used to ameliorate some of the issues that are happening online.

Ms. Shanly Dixon: I think it could be a matter of levelling out their knowledge around digital literacy and digital gender issues.

Sometimes when I go into an area with at-risk youth and they have good education and are really aware, it's amazing what their perspectives are and their position is. There's no difference if you provide access to high-quality education and you have adults who can guide, help, and mentor people from any walk of life.

Sometimes I go into an at-risk situation with youth who are not in school, who have dropped out, who are not employed. I go into a community centre, and the community centre facilitator will tell me that the kids are very engaged and very savvy. They're online, and they're doing three things. They're Facebooking, playing video games, and downloading porn.

That's not savvy in the same way as when you go into a school with good, strong digital literacy education where teachers are teaching young people to access all kinds of information, to evaluate it critically, and to use all kinds of technology in different ways.

I think that's where we see a big cultural divide, and it's going to get bigger and more emerging, I would guess.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Where are they accessing this digital literacy? Is it in the school system, or...?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: Sometimes it's in the school system or sometimes it's in a really good youth centre that young people will choose to go to.

The organization I work with is approached by schools, youth centres, or community organizations, usually when they have a problem to address, and usually when they need programming. We kind of parachute in and try to embed our programming into something that young people are interested in and want to do. We'll level up their skills that way.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: What age groups are you looking at?

I know for the RCMP advisory youth group, it's 13. It was mentioned before that some of the people accessing this information are younger than that. What are the ages you're looking at?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: The cyber-violence project we have funding for from Status of Women Canada is for ages 15 to 25, but the organization I work with works with people from ages six to 96.

The Chair: We're going to go into a second round here, starting with Mrs. Vecchio for five minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Ms. Dixon, I'm going to start with you. We've talked a lot about normalization. With this type of behaviour, is there going to be a concern for young girls and women when it comes to sexual predators? Is there going to be a concern that could lead to potential pornography? Where is that grey area? When does it turn into a hard line between just experimenting and showing one's sexuality and worrying about the sexual predators who are now luring those people and trying to get them into some trade or things of that sort? What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: Just in my everyday work, this is my experience. I've noticed more schools and youth centres facing issues of young girls being groomed and lured online, young girls in vulnerable positions. I recently went to speak to a high school, and two students, young women, enrolled in the high school with the sole intention of grooming and luring other students out of the high school.

This is a middle-class community. It's important to have education and knowledge awareness around this. We have this kind of perception that there is no "stranger danger" online. We have sold the idea that you're safe and that it's exploration of sexuality; but there are predators. I think we have to make young people aware and acknowledge that it's an issue.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a totally different topic—more of a scientific thing—could the algorithms of Facebook and other social media sites be modified to deselect material that is hypersexual, pornographic, or violent? Would there be anything we could do on the deselection when it comes to our algorithms?

That goes to you, Ms. Dixon.

Ms. Shanly Dixon: I do have people who are working on that. There's a computer science professor at McGill University who has a conditional grant, and he's working on creating algorithms around hate speech. I think we have to be really careful, because sometimes algorithms and the affordances of design get us into situations that we're now trying to get out of. Putting the solutions into the hands of Facebook is problematic for me. We have to be careful where we go for our solutions. I think there is potential in that area, but I think sitting down with ICT companies and video game developers and working out some kind of standard would be a really big step forward.

● (1620)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's awesome. Thank you very much.

I will move to the RCMP. Bill C-22 was an act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service, to help stop children from being sexually exploited online. Do you know the results of that legislation? Has it had positive results? Has it had results? Can you just identify any findings on that?

Insp Peter Payne: The results have been positive and that fact is attributed to the increase in reports over the last couple of years. Industry is on board and we are getting a lot more reports. That's why I say the trend is upward and it's only going to continue to go upward with more industry reporting.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's fantastic.

To what degree do the RCMP education measures actually curb cyber-violence or bullying? If you're looking at that group of children between the ages of 13 and 18, do you actually have anything that shows any results or statistics on the positive effects? We see the increase in reporting, which is very positive, but do you see more discussion as well, among our youth saying “yes, this is an issue”?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: We don't have any hard statistics on the impact of the education on cyber-violence. What we are finding is that these youth are talking about it; they are coming forward; and they're openly discussing it, so that's promising. They're working with us to create education and prevention initiatives that they feel will best educate similar youth of that age group.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Excellent.

The Chair: Very good. That's your time.

We're over to Ms. Damoff for five minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you very much to all of you for being here today.

I think it was Mr. Fraser who asked where the cyber-violence is coming from, and I just want to follow up a bit.

I know you mentioned that when it's international, you can block the sites, but people just find other ways of coming in. When you're doing these investigations, how would it be broken down between perpetrators who are international versus those who are within the country, and within that, whether they are people who are known to the victims or whether they are strangers?

Insp Peter Payne: A lot of the online child exploitation is global; it's not only in Canada. A lot of times, the perpetrator could live in another country and the victim could be in Canada, or vice versa, so we do have that collaboration goal within the law enforcement agency jurisdictions. If we establish that the perpetrator is in Germany and the victims are in Canada, we work closely on those investigations.

Ms. Pam Damoff: When you're investigating them, are the majority of them from other countries or from within Canada? Where are the majority of the files that you see coming from? Are they international or are they within the country?

Insp Peter Payne: There's a combination. They could be international. But quite often there's a broad reach, so you might have a situation in which it's not just in Canada; it's throughout the world. Every now and then we'll run major projects. You have a cross-section of both victims and perpetrators, not only in Canada but throughout the world.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Right. One of the things I saw was that Cypertip looked at 45,000 images and 80% of them were of children under age 12. If that's the case, that's an age demographic that we just aren't focusing on, or it seems that we're not focusing on educating them. Kids are becoming much more savvy and sharing things at a much younger age, yet we don't really start to talk to them until they're 13.

Do you see a gap there when we're dealing with these things, or are they two different types of crime?

Insp Kimberly Taplin: The demographic of 13 to 18 is our consultation youth. Those are the youth that we reach out to, to discuss with us initiatives and what the hot items are, as far as they're concerned, with respect to policing issues.

However, our education and prevention material is not geared to just that demographic; it is actually aimed at educating a wider demographic. But for consultation purposes, that's the age group we target.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do you find any challenges educating kids that are younger? Society and sometimes parents do not believe that their kids are doing things and do not want their children to learn more about the Internet.

Insp Kimberly Taplin: I have no information to suggest that's the case.

● (1625)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do you have anything, Ms. Dixon?

I was wondering if you think that the new technologies we have actually increase cyber-violence or they just provide new avenues for violence against young women and girls to be perpetrated.

Ms. Shanly Dixon: That's a really big question. I've been doing this for over a decade, and I did my Ph.D. on young people's engagement with digital culture. We really believed in the whole digital native myth, and thought that young people were going to lead the way. We thought they were doing their own thing but that they were inherently adept. I think that maybe we kind of stood back a bit and young people engaged in developing their own social norms online, and these maybe weren't as positive as we would have hoped.

I'm a person who really believes in opportunity. I teach digital literacy education, but we are starting to see some of the problems that are arising.

I think it's just the changing structure of society. You see a lot of times, when I talk to professors or I give keynotes, that they don't want to have conversations with young people about technology, because they think young people are more adept. My perspective is that you have a lot of wisdom from life experience that you can bring to that conversation, and if you're teaching the philosophy of ethics, you can bring that to the conversation.

I think we're going to see a lot more cyber-violence and a lot of new types of cyber-violence with virtual reality technology. We've had video game companies come to discuss with us their concerns about the cyber-violence that will be enacted against girls and young women with these emerging technologies. I think it's going to be a whole new thing.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: We're out of time.

I want to say thank you very much to our witnesses for appearing before us today and for sharing their expertise with us. We really appreciate it.

We are now going to suspend for two minutes.

We will clear the witnesses and get the next panel ready, and we'll start right at 4:30 sharp.

Rachel.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Just before excusing the witnesses, would it be possible to request a written response to my question with regard to legislation initiatives that could, perhaps, be beneficial to the RCMP going forward?

The Chair: Absolutely. We will send the question to you, and you can forward your response to the clerk.

Thanks again.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Madam Chair, could we stay two more minutes, so I could ask one more question?

The Chair: What is the will of the committee? Sure.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thanks.

Ms. Dixon, would it help denormalize online violence if school boards and provinces incorporated digital literacy into their curriculum?

Ms. Shanly Dixon: I think that would help.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

● (1625)

(Pause)

● (1630)

The Chair: We are here for our second panel. We are extremely fortunate today to have with us Carol Todd from the Amanda Todd Legacy Society and Leah Parsons, a representative from the Rehtaeh Parsons Society.

Ladies, we want to welcome you to the committee. We know what bravery it takes to come and share your stories with a view to preventing these tragedies for future girls, so we thank you.

We are going to begin with a 10-minute speech from each of you, and then we will go into our questions.

We will start with Ms. Parsons.

Ms. Leah Parsons (Representative, Rehtaeh Parsons Society, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me to speak here today on a topic that is very near and dear to my heart. My name is Leah Parsons. I am the mother of Rehtaeh Parsons. Rehtaeh died by suicide 17 months after her sexual assault. Rehtaeh was assaulted by four males in November 2011. A photo was taken and shared without her permission or knowledge. The photo was widely distributed in her school and community. She struggled emotionally to regain her sense of being. However, every time she attempted a fresh start, she was faced with the reality that the image continued to be shared as she moved from school to school.

This crime was reported to the police within a week yet the image was never contained or removed. Rehtaeh was just 15 years old at the time of this trauma. At this young age Rehtaeh was just developing the very core of who she would become. She left grade nine just a few months prior as a straight-A student with big hopes and dreams for her future.

Once she became a target of cruelty and ridicule, her mental health started to deteriorate, and it happened very fast. Soon my bright, confident girl was struggling with thoughts of suicide. Panic, anger, and sadness were emotions she cycled through on a regular basis. She just didn't have enough time and life experience to see that it was possible to navigate through this dark period. She became terrified of her own thoughts.

During the 17 months of struggle, Rehtaeh was forced to endure harassment both online and in person from her peer group. She knew what happened to her was not her fault, but society continually told her otherwise. The agencies put in place to protect did not seem capable and/or willing to help us navigate these turbulent waters. We were left desperately seeking and searching for answers and direction. Since Rehtaeh left us on April 7, 2013, at the young age of 17, I have been an advocate in the areas of cyber-abuse, sexualized violence, youth mental health, and suicide prevention and awareness. Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh shone a light on the dangers of social media with profound impact. It was very clear that society had to do something. Their deaths also created important conversations at our dinner tables across Canada and around the world.

Many changes have occurred since, but we still have a long way to go to protect females in our society. We talk more about the impact of cyber-violence now that we are aware, but we must continue to move along to empower and educate. I reflected long and hard when I was invited to here to speak about the issues of cyber-violence. What kept coming back to me were the many voices of mothers and young women who reach out to me for help and advice, sharing their stories of abuse, and desperately wanting change to make their lives and the lives of all females safe. They feel vulnerable and alone, and I know that feeling. Women are not taken seriously and are often dismissed when we voice our concerns.

Blaming women for crimes committed against them is not new behaviour. Women have been systemically marginalized for centuries. However, the ways in which women are targeted in this day and age unfold differently because of social media. On a regular basis, women share their concerns with me about the sharing of intimate images without permission and being a target of online cruelty and sexualized violence.

While some police and school officials take these offenses seriously, many do not seem to know what to do. Sometimes they even add comments that blame the victim. Time and time again I have been told that officials are advising women to stay off the Internet to avoid being harassed. In the case of photos shared online, some officials are suggesting that the female should just stop sharing intimate images. This advice is not the answer and only adds to the victim-blaming mentality.

There also seems to be a disconnect in knowledge within police agencies across the country regarding the new Bill C-13 within the Criminal Code of Canada, which prohibits the sharing of intimate images without consent.

● (1635)

Agencies have to make it a priority to know the law and enforce it. Once that image is online, getting the image removed continues to be problematic for many females. There does not seem to be a uniform procedure to remove online images, and it appears to take a very long time to get an image taken down.

As far as females being harassed online is concerned, there are no laws in place to protect them. Nova Scotia's Cyber-safety Act, put in place in 2013 after Rehtaeh died, was the first of its kind in Canada and was enacted to protect people from cyber-violence. However, this law was struck down for being too broad. Nova Scotia justice minister Diana Whalen will be introducing new legislation in the spring of 2017. This is a step in the right direction.

Enacting new laws and responding in a fast, efficient manner are just some of the ways we combat cyber-violence, but we cannot ignore the fact that there are underlying deep-rooted ideologies that will take a very long time to undo. Women are still objectified, and the message from multiple sources that we are being bombarded with on a daily basis is that you are not enough, meaning you're not pretty enough, thin enough, sexy enough, smart enough, etc.

When females internalize this message, some suffer immensely from poor self-image, which can often manifest in females being cruel to other females. This can be seen in some adolescent girls who are competitive, cruel, and hurtful to their female peers. That was certainly evident in the horrible messages I read that were sent to my daughter.

My background is in psychology, and from this perspective it is easy to recognize that what we do not like in ourselves, we cannot embrace in others. Therefore, empowering young girls to love who they are is of utmost importance. Peer acceptance is very important, and when young girls are at the receiving end of cyber-violence, their mental health suffers. We have to redefine what it means to be female.

That being said, we certainly cannot leave out the male population in these conversations. It always amazes when, after I've given presentations in schools, young males approach me to ask more questions about consent. They are confused, because no one has had a conversation with them about what sexual consent entails Some young males truly believe that when a girl says no to sexual advances, it's time to apply more pressure.

A similar behaviour is now common online in the pressuring of females to send intimate images. We attempt to teach our girls what they need to do to be safe but not how to value who they are. We are certainly missing the mark when it comes to males.

If males continue to view females as objects, how can they value them as human beings? Rehtaeh lost her value as a human being the day she was labelled a slut.

I know that if Rehtaeh had been seen as a person that night back in 2011 and not as an object to be conquered, and if her peers had rallied around her to show their support instead of blaming her, I would not be here speaking to you today.

I know that we can make a difference in the lives of all human beings, and we must act now. We are losing way too many young lives to suicide due to violence in all forms.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Todd, you have 10 minutes.

Ms. Carol Todd (Mother and Advocate, Amanda Todd Legacy Society): Thank you for the invitation to speak in front of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in relation to violence against young girls and women.

My name is Carol Todd. I am an educator in British Columbia, but I am best known as the mother of Amanda Todd. Amanda has become a prominent figure worldwide in the fight against cyber-bullying, sextortion, and revenge pornography. Born on November 27, 1996, she lived too briefly, until the age of 15. On October 10, 2012, she took her own life.

As a mother, I will always carry the heartache of losing my daughter.

While Amanda died far too young, she left a legacy in her own words posting her YouTube video on her YouTube channel, which has been viewed approximately 40 million times across the world. The legacy is one of promoting greater awareness and education of the issues that surround cyber-bullying, social media safety, and ultimately, mental health.

Amanda's life from ages 12 to 15 encompassed sextortion, bullying, both online and off-line, cyber-abuse, and mental illness. There were reports to the police and changes in schools to help rectify what was happening in her life. The police suggested keeping her off-line, which we know now isn't the right answer, as a young person feels that their lifeline is attached to the technology device that is in their hands. A teenager considers their device to be oxygen, and without it, they don't believe they can exist. Police officers can sometimes seem out of touch with the teens and will flippantly tell parents, “teens will be teens” just as we often hear that boys will be boys.

Amanda had a learning disability related to language processing and had been diagnosed with ADHD, PTSD, and anxiety disorder, which impacted her life immensely. But she found a place that made her feel successful in the world of music and singing. At a young age, she shared her songs on YouTube and started her own channel, where people—strangers—would compliment her and invite her into chat rooms to speak. Amanda and her friends, being members of the pioneer age of technology, joined in to make new friends and talk about their favourite singers and stars.

At that time, our knowledge of what existed on the Internet was not as widespread as it is now. Warnings were not widely in place about avoiding unknown profiles, about which social media sites were full of predators, and about how to protect yourself when talking to strangers. Today it is still impossible to know exactly who you are talking to online; therefore, stranger danger warnings are necessary and need to be instilled in everyone, from the very young to adults.

Amanda and her friends ended up sharing personal information with those strangers and learned first-hand about the dark side of the Internet, a predator's playground where strangers can prey on the kids who visit these social media sites.

During a chat session, someone pretended to be a teenaged boy and convinced Amanda to flash him and, unknown to her, he screencapped her image. These cappers collect and trade child pornography images and use them in criminal ways. Amanda's image was used to exploit her and was posted to adult pornography sites and later put on a social media network for everyone to see. It was later found that the profile was alleged to be linked to a 35-year-old man who now sits in a Netherlands jail awaiting trial for crimes against a hundred other victims across the world.

When he did not get what he wanted from Amanda, and after the initial posting, the profile then contacted and taunted me with what my daughter had done. When one teen told her parent, it was then reported to the RCMP, who came to our door that early morning. This left Amanda shocked and feeling bad about her situation, instilling fear in her, as we didn't know where this person resided. After this incident, her peers continued to taunt and ridicule her face to face, online, in school, and in our community. This left Amanda powerless, fearful, and anxiety-ridden and not wanting to leave her own house.

This alleged profile made by the predator continued to follow, terrorize, and threaten Amanda over social media, even after she went off social media and went off-line as had been recommended. When we allowed her to go back online, the person came back and continued to taunt her, harass her, and threaten her. Amanda moved schools multiple times, and it is known to us now that this person created a hundred alias profiles and followed her around.

The story was documented by The Fifth Estate in programs called “The Sextortion of Amanda Todd” and “Stalking Amanda Todd: The Man in the Shadows”, which it is recommended we all watch so we can continue to learn.

● (1645)

When Amanda was off-line, the abusive behaviours continued to swirl around social media. Not knowing what was being said or by whom added to the problem of not being able to provide the supports to help deal with the situation. In Amanda's case, there were individuals who continued the behaviours in both anonymous and non-anonymous positions. My once-spirited and adventurous child became more reclusive and sad, and she felt alone. On April 14, 2014, the RCMP announced that an arrest had been made in connection to Amanda and an alleged 100 other victims around the world. He is currently awaiting trial in the Netherlands and will be extradited to Canada at the conclusion of those proceedings to face charges on the digital abuse and “sextortion“ that he subjected Amanda to online.

I have had the opportunity to not only travel globally to share her legacy but hopefully also to educate on and create more awareness of the issues and concerns that face our younger generation as well as to provide information to their parents and daily caregivers who can present it to guide them along the path of life.

Someone shared with me how they felt after following Amanda's story and the journey it has taken on itself. She felt that this particular story had touched the hearts and minds of many because of the different pieces that the story contains. When I am up on stage speaking to people of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and religions, I can see what she is talking about. Amanda, in her unknowing braveness, has opened herself up not only to share her story but also to expose the different sides of it.

We have come to realize that what happened to Amanda can happen to anyone. As Amanda said, everyone has a story. When those stories come out, and they belong to your child, your relatives, or your grandchildren, they sometimes mean more. We often hear people say, “it won't happen in my family”, “not my child”, or “my teen would never do that”, and until it happens, we can't believe that it could. No one is immune from becoming a statistic. We can't wait for yet another headline, and we can't fall into the trap of saying “not in our family”. We hope that it never happens in any person's family, but sometimes it does. I am proof, and Leah is proof, as are many others, some of whom will be speaking before your committee.

In this 21st century, young girls and women, and young boys and men are dealing with a lot more than we ever did 30 years ago in terms of sexualized behaviours and easy access to sharing intimate information that was once kept in a quiet manner. Amanda's words in her video are her personal victim impact statement. If I could have one wish in the world, it would be to have her with us to share what it meant to her to make it and what she would have expected us to learn from it.

I use the snowflake as an example of how precious, unique, and individual all of our children are. A snowflake is one of a kind. There are no two snowflakes the same. Our children, too, are one of a kind, and no two are the same. A snowflake is brilliant and beautiful, as is each and every one of our children. Sadly, they are all fragile. No matter how tough and strong our modern children appear, or how much they know about technology, they are still our children, and we must take care of them.

Even as teens, when they want to be fully independent, they need a hug, our tenderness, and a safe place to land. As parents and caregivers, that is our job. When we get busy, or are directing our attention to the hundreds of things we have to handle every day, we forget how much the little things mean to us, and to all of us.

Before Amanda died, she surprised me one day by asking why I didn't call her princess snowflake. I didn't realize this was something that she enjoyed

In conclusion, I want to thank all of you for the time and effort you have put into creating laws to address abuse. What is happening in our society also costs the lives of many wonderful Canadian children and young women. Just think how, if you are living in a country like the United States and you get a ticket for speeding, often enough you would have to go to a four-hour to six-hour class in order to watch videos and learn how to behave appropriately. Maybe that is something we need to consider in our country in the future for people who abuse children and young women online.

● (1650)

Speaking for many Canadians who care about our country, I applaud and thank the Canadian government for putting cyber-violence against young girls and women on the agenda and working to develop of better strategies and future outcomes.

I would also like to thank all the communities worldwide that have shown support and for the work they have done. Without everyone's voice, we could not get this issue and topic to be discussed. Looking at media feeds, we can see that we have created a conversation around the world.

On behalf of my daughter and other fellow Canadians, I want the world to be a better place, free of victimization, sexualized crimes, and cyber-violence. We must work together to create a safer place for Canadians to live, because acts of violence against young girls and women are indeed preventable.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, ladies.

[*Translation*]

We will now start the questions and comments period with Mr. Serré.

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

[*English*]

Thank you so much for sharing your story today. We are sorry for your loss. I know you've taken the time today, and your courage to move this issue forward is making a difference all across Canada and the world.

I had a series of questions, but having heard both of you talk and being a parent, I see how powerless we are to a certain extent. What can we do as parents? Do you have one or two recommendations that you would want to share with us as parents?

Ms. Leah Parsons: Obviously, I would say have lots of conversations with your children about what it means to be responsible when using the Internet, and with that comes stages of responsibility. A lot of parents just give their kid a phone and then they have access to everything. Instead of doing that, start off with very limited access and then talk about being a responsible digital citizen, and continue those conversations and check. A lot of parents just can't keep up with all the apps and everything out there.

I think we need some education and some workshops for parents, for people to share what is out there and what they need to be aware of, because it's hard for parents to stay educated in that way.

Ms. Carol Todd: I have three more pages, but I won't read them all. I'll only read the titles that I thought about because I've been thinking about solutions and ways that we can work on this as a society.

It's building awareness and capacity through education, curriculum, social empathy, and healthy relationships. It's talking about reporting and law enforcement. If something happens and it's reported, what's going to happen after it has been reported? I hear from so many families who say they've reported it, and their kids have just been told to get off the Internet. What's the next step? I own that loss, and I share that with them.

There are survivor stories: We hear of lots of people, individuals who have been victimized, young girls, young women, young boys, and men. We need to listen to their stories, listen to how they survived, hear about what brought them resiliency and strength. Let's learn from their stories.

Social media and the Internet: Social media networks need to work more on their safety impacts, what they're doing, and how they're doing it.

With regard to pornography on the Internet, more research and widespread research needs to be done on the impact on young boys of watching pornography and how that is rewiring the structures of their brain and how they're behaving. Once again, it goes back to behaviours and relationships.

We need to shift societal norms so we can freely talk about these issues, because without being able to freely talk about them, we can't come to any solutions that have a definite, positive nature.

We need to ask our young people for input, because young people listen to young people. They don't always listen to us older people who may be a bit wiser, but we can definitely get our young people to take on more of a leadership role.

● (1655)

Mr. Marc Serré: On that note, regarding the age, we heard earlier that the RCMP did a consultation with 13-year-olds and older adolescents. We have our own committee, the status of women, talking about 15- to 20-year-olds. What are your thoughts about having those conversations earlier? In Ontario, sex education was in the curriculum, and that created some controversy about age. What are your thoughts, both of you, on the age to start that consultation?

Ms. Leah Parsons: I feel that you do have to start younger, because they know a lot more than we think they do and they do have access to so much at a younger age.

I was asked to speak at a school once for grade 5 and 6, whereas it's usually junior high and high school that I go to. At first I was a little hesitant but, when I went in there and asked them how many had cell phones, 85% of their hands went up, and that was grade 5. Of course, you have to change your language a little bit, but they know way more than we think they do, so having them out there with only peer support sharing and not adult guidance is very dangerous. I do believe that younger is a good way to start.

Ms. Carol Todd: We definitely have to go younger, and I also have gone into classrooms to speak to 7-year-olds and 8-year-olds. We are even seeing 2-year-olds and 3-year-olds in shopping carts with their parents' devices and tools. So these kids know their way around technology way better than all of us do, but they need to understand the appropriate behaviours and respect. That's why we're teaching more about resiliency and human relationships in the classrooms, because when a motor vehicle is involved in an accident we don't blame the car; it's the driver. When we talk about technology and we talk about applications—Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, or whatever—it's not really the application but the behaviour behind the technology that's driving what's going to happen to that next person. We really need to talk with our children about how emotions and relationships and behaviours impact us, and we can do that with kids as young as three and four years old in preschool, in kindergarten, and in grade 1, because it all starts way back there.

Mr. Marc Serré: You probably don't have time to answer, Mrs. Parsons, but you mentioned bill C-13 earlier and the disconnection with law enforcement. Could you expand a bit on?

Ms. Leah Parsons: I get a lot of messages from people who are reaching out for help, who say that their image is out there and that they went to the police. Just recently in Nova Scotia, not even two weeks ago, a young lady's intimate images were online and the police did not know about the bill, and they told her there was nothing they could do to help her because she shared the image in the first place with somebody. It was really, really upsetting to see that the agencies...and I know that some agencies do know, because I also hear from people who say they went to the police and they went right into the school and they knew about the bill. But it's in pockets; it's not uniform. Everyone doesn't know, even within police agencies.

That's just feedback that I get on a regular basis, so I was really upset when that came to my attention a couple of weeks ago. Here we are, and they didn't even know. Now they've turned around and apologized and they've come forward.

● (1700)

The Chair: That's your time. I'm sorry.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, just very quickly. Ms. Todd mentioned that she has three more pages of written material. I'd like to invite her and Ms. Parsons, if they have things they couldn't get to, to submit them in writing to the committee. Is that acceptable?

The Chair: Absolutely. That would be very acceptable.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: First and foremost, like everybody else here at the table, I thank you so much for being here. It is very important to hear from the two of you who have experienced first-hand the losses of your daughters. I myself, along, I know, with many other members around this table are parents, so I can only imagine the pain and suffering you went through and I'm sure it remains there today.

In the time of your experiences, and by no means do I want to seem cold and terrible on this, because I recognize that it is so deep in you, but have you found that the cyber-violence or cyber-bullying has become more prevalent in discussions? Has education become better, or do you find that you sort of come in, and people talk about it, and then it fades away within a week or two and people are back to doing the normal thing again?

Ms. Carol Todd: I think it depends on the province you live in. We're talking about the education aspect and how important it might be in the curriculum. I know that in British Columbia, where technology is now embedded into our curriculum, it's our responsibility to talk about digital responsibility and digital emotions and avenues like that.

Also in the four years I've been going through this journey, I never thought I'd have to be doing research in this area, but when I watch the news feeds, the topic of conversation is more worldwide in every country. I also get messages from different people across the world, so it's a huge concern, but we really need to put things in place to make it more global in terms of education and awareness.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Leah.

Ms. Leah Parsons: I agree. Again, it comes down to pockets. Some schools put a lot of emphasis on it. They carry it out not just on one day or one week but throughout the school year. They keep coming back to it, but it doesn't seem to be uniform.

Again, putting the emphasis on it and making it mandatory are really important, and this is an issue around the world. We get messages from around the world, and it's a concern for everybody.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Unfortunately, you have become the spokespersons for this issue. I'm sure, as you said, that many people are coming out and speaking to you.

Have you found, since your own experience, that our support services have increased and developed properly? What can we be doing better as a nation to ensure that we do have that support for our young victims and girls who have gone through what both of your daughters went through?

Ms. Carol Todd: We are continuing to work on support systems, but there is never enough. There comes a point when you listen to the stories of families. They now know how to report. Kids and young people are now learning how to share that information with a trusting adult in order to report, but after it gets reported, it drops off. Where did they go next? What did they do?

With victimization and trauma, if they're lucky enough to have caught the perpetrator, then the trauma continues on. Where is the counselling? Where are the resources? Where is the further help? Sometimes it's cost-prohibitive or there's a wait-list. When you're dealing with mental health, there's no time to wait, because a matter of a day, a week, or a month could mean life and death.

That's the part where I feel our system breaks down. It is the support system after the trauma. That goes with bullying, cyber-bullying, and mental health.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely. Thank you so much. I'm listening to you. This is a conversation to have over a cup of tea, because it's so intimate, so I really thank you.

They talk a lot about parents monitoring. I try to do my best by monitoring my 13-year-old's cellphone, and the phones of my 18-, 19-, 20- and 22-year-olds. I don't monitor my 22-year-old's anymore. What are some of the things that we can do proactively as parents?

A lot of these conversations do start at home. I know you have both gone through this. I'm sure you're just like the rest of us who just want the best for our children, but we don't know what's happening. What are some things that you think we can do or some tips for parents and some education or things that we need to do better? As parents we really don't know what happens when we walk out the door unless we're holding their hands for the next 24 hours each day. What are some of your recommendations?

● (1705)

Ms. Leah Parsons: I would say take it out of the bedroom. Don't let them go to bed with their devices. If you start that at a young enough age, it becomes something that they just get used to.

A lot of parents are just leaving their devices in the room. Not only is that sleep deprivation for the kid because they're addicted to these devices but it just sets up really negative patterns.

I have a 12-year old daughter. She just started junior high school, and she doesn't have a cellphone. She's the only one of her friend group that doesn't have a cellphone. She begs me every day and I'm terrified.

I know I'll eventually have to get her that cellphone, but in the meantime, I'm just not finished talking about it yet.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: And you don't have to be.

Ms. Leah Parsons: That's for sure.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Ms. Todd, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Carol Todd: I talk about this all the time. It's bringing that trust and communication into the family setting, and talking at a young age and having children talk to parents in a way that they know that their parents are not going to judge them and get angry at them. Vice versa, when parents are talking to their kids, the kids need to know that it's out of love; it's not out of wanting to creep online, and finding out everything they are doing.

There are different ways to handle it at different ages. We can't stop the proliferation of technology. It's becoming faster and quicker, and parents and adults cannot keep up with the information out there. We need to educate our parents and teachers. We need to educate the communities, law enforcement, and everybody on how to have that conversation with the kids, because parents cannot do it alone. There has to be a community global effort in order to get that information to our kids on how to behave, what to do, what not to do, what to do with your friends, and how you feel.

The Chair: That's your time.

Ms. Malcolmson, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to echo my colleagues' words. I'm very sorry for your loss, and I'm very grateful for your advocacy and bravery and the legacy you are working towards. Thank you.

Ms. Parsons, after the review of the handling of your daughter's case, the attorney general in Nova Scotia made two commitments: one was a pledge to work with all partners inside and outside of government, in particular police and public prosecution services; and the other was to improve provincial policies and procedures.

Can you give us a big-picture sense of whether you feel that work has been done?

Ms. Leah Parsons: I don't feel that work has been done yet. They may be working towards it.

I will have a meeting with justice minister Diana Whalen in a couple of weeks, so I will be getting an update on that. There's a lot to do.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: The other element I read was that the attorney general and justice minister said that “effort will require the input and co-operation of parents, schools, police, health-care providers, advocates and communities all working together...”.

Are you confident that change has been made?

Ms. Leah Parsons: It hasn't yet. That's why I have the appointment. I'm going to get an update. I'll know more once I meet with her.

I know that she is working on putting together the new cyber-safety act. I know that they hope to introduce a new one in 2017.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: If you do get a sense of that, I think we would probably all be glad to hear your update. We don't always have a handle at the federal level on this working together in co-operation with teachers and police. However, we can still provide leadership, and we're optimistic that a national strategy could get at bridging between the provinces.

Ms. Todd referred to British Columbia's education system improvements. I would hope that when one province or even one school board gets it right that we at the federal level can then show leadership and transmit that, so that each family and each jurisdiction has a hope of having common and equal access to justice and prevention.

We'd love your update, if you do get some news.

● (1710)

Ms. Leah Parsons: I will definitely update you.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Ms. Todd, I'm curious as to what you're hearing from families you're in touch with now.

Are they starting to see results from the cyber-violence program being brought into the B.C. education system curriculum, and do you think that a parent and a child experiencing what your daughter did would have a better chance now of getting the support they need?

Ms. Carol Todd: Our new curriculum just started this year. Digital responsibility has been talked about, but it's in separate zones. A school can decide to do it or not to do it. They could do it at 150%, or they could do it at 25%.

We need to get telecommunication companies, who disperse cellphones and sell them and data plans to our families, involved so that they can have the broader discussion, because we're not going to do it just at schools. I think that it is almost too late. The conversation on cyber-violence between the people I'm in contact with is happening because of Amanda's story and Rehtaeh's story, and because of so many more stories around North America. A conversation about cyber-violence, as I said, is taking place. Families are feeling more comfortable in bringing out that news article and saying, “Have you seen this?”

Real-life stories make an impact. Unfortunately, we're real-life stories. However, I'm okay with my story being shared if it's going to make a difference in a family's life.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: It's kind of the opposite of victim shaming, isn't it? You're really bringing this story out there.

Ms. Carol Todd: I think so.

Some people actually go after Leah and me and say we're only doing this for fame. I would give this all up in a heartbeat. On my plane ride here, I was in tears. I really shouldn't have to be on that plane to come and sit in front of this committee and talk about my daughter and the story that is presented. It was so emotional for me to do this. But I will do this, and I will stand. As I said, if it's going to help, then I'll be there.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I think I speak for all the members of the committee when I say that we as legislators now have a shared responsibility. We have invited you to tell your story. We have heard your story, and we are with you in solidarity about finding solutions. It is not only the parents' responsibility.

In closing, if either of you has any advice for us on the issue of equal access to justice regardless of where you live in the country—whether it is about the education system, the policing, or the conviction system—I would be really happy to hear your advice.

Ms. Carol Todd: I think we have different silos. I have always said that we work in three different silos. We work on prevention, intervention, and reaction. Many times, when it comes to law enforcement, that is the reactionary side. We, as Canadians, educators, parents, and communities, need to work on the prevention side so that we don't have to have criminalization of individuals, whether young or old, because of behavioural acts. We really need to focus on what information we are going to get out there to our communities in order to prevent stories—information on how to treat people, how to treat young girls, how to treat women, and how to treat boys, because we are focusing just on females, but this happens in the male sector, too. It is all about the behaviours and the mindset of what is going on out there.

There are big questions. If we write down all the questions, we can work on coming up with the answers, but without those questions, there are myriad things out there, and they just keep moving super fast, at lightspeed.

The Chair: All right. We will move to Mrs. Nassif, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you.

Madam Chair, I would like to share my time with Mr. Fraser, if I have time left.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Okay.

[*English*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Ms. Parsons and Ms. Todd, I would like to thank you, not as a parliamentarian but as a mother of triplets. I was always worried, when my kids were teenagers, about how to protect them and what to do. I wasn't sleeping at night, not knowing if I was doing the right thing or the wrong thing. Thank God, now they are good students and good kids.

I would like to thank you for appearing before our committee today to share your true stories in order to help prevent other tragedies from happening here in Canada and across the world. Thank you for being here.

Considering the context of the cases of Amanda and Rehtaeh, do you feel that your needs were sufficiently met by the police and the community? If not, what was missing from the equation? What difficulties did you face throughout the process that you felt were just roadblocks or inadequacies that needed to be overcome, and what would your suggestions be?

● (1715)

Ms. Leah Parsons: My background is in psychology, so I felt I was equipped to try to find my way through the waters to get her help. I was so wrong. There are many silos, and they don't talk to each other. Not only did Rehtaeh have to tell her story constantly everywhere we went but we didn't get support. Instead of someone coming forward and saying, “this family has suffered a trauma. We need to support her” and saying “here are the police, the counsellors, victim services, and everyone we need to place around this family”, none of that happened. I was left calling and saying, “I don't understand. Why is the photo still being shared? Why aren't you questioning the boys?” There were so many questions.

When your child is traumatized, the whole family is traumatized. I was thinking, “We can get through this. I know how to navigate these systems”, but I had no clue. I think of myself and think that I have the wherewithal to do that, and then I think of all the other families who don't even come up to the state where they think they know what they can do. As soon as they hit the first door, what do they do? It was horrible.

They did an investigation and then, one year later, they told her they were doing nothing and that the photo was still being shared. To me, the first step when you report is to have a team surround you. That is necessary, regardless of whether charges are laid. You need to have that support system come around you and say, “We are going to help you. This is what happens next. This is what you are going to do” instead of you coming up against police officers who dismiss you and tell you, “I have other cases. You are not my only case. This was just teenagers, and there was alcohol.” That is what I see as a huge hurdle, and that is the first step.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Ms. Todd, go ahead, please.

Ms. Carol Todd: When we told our personal story to the law enforcement agency, I too initially felt that we were dismissed. The week after the image was reported and we went in to talk to the RCMP, we were made to feel that they were looking at Amanda as a dysfunctional child who had issues of her own.

You know what? She wasn't the best behaved. She was nervous, so she laughed at inappropriate times, and I think the judgment was made then that this child could be problematic and it was her fault. That wasn't the case. I think now, with the tragic ending, everyone is looking at the story and saying, “Oh, we should have done this; we could have done this.”

The week after, I got a message through my social media network from a person who allegedly knew all about Amanda. I reported it to the police, and the answer to me was to just ignore it, delete it, block it. Then, I found out three years later that the profile name was one of this person's aliases. As a mother, I feel that I should have pursued it. I should have done more. I could have become that vigilante mother, and I should have, because it meant my daughter's life or death.

As for the RCMP, the law enforcement agencies, and their behaviours, they need more training in empathy. They need more training in how to deal with young people when they come to a house. There was an instance where Amanda overdosed on pills because of the circumstances in her life. There were two police officers in my house, and I felt that I was watching a good cop and a bad cop, because the one cop pulled her down from the room and asked her why she wanted to kill herself. Was she stupid? What was she thinking? I said to the other police officer, “Why is he doing this?” That officer said, “Well, that's the way he runs, and that's what he does.” No one asked me whether my daughter had previously been diagnosed with PTSD. That was the last time she would talk to a police officer.

They need more training and more empathy. That's the part that I remember and that just sticks in my head. Maybe I should have stepped in. Maybe I should have said something different. I can't change the past right now, but I can certainly help to change the future.

● (1720)

Mrs. Eva Nassif: For individuals who have been involved in such serious scenarios, are there sufficient resources available for victims of these crimes who continue to be victimized after the original crime has occurred?

Ms. Carol Todd: No. No, there aren't enough resources. There isn't enough compensation. There aren't enough supports out there for people who have been victimized, not only through cyber-violence but also through sexual assaults and with rape. The story goes on and on, and we're not just talking about young girls. You can be traumatized for years. It could come out 10 years later, but where is that person going to go for help when someone says that it happened 10 years ago and they should have gotten over it by now? We have to really think about what's in place in the structure.

The Chair: We're going to go to our second round now, with Ms. Harder for five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: First and foremost, along with all of my colleagues, let me thank you for your courage. It's certainly a pleasure to have you here today. When we took on this study, it was with a lot of personal passion, and you were certainly two of the witnesses who were top of mind for me and who I wanted to hear from. Thank you.

I am very interested in having you two expand on some of the legislative changes that you might see needing to be made. You've alluded to a number of them. The fact that you went to the RCMP and were more or less shrugged off really concerns me. I'm wondering how we define that identifiable path, if you will. In other words, a mom comes in and has some concerns, so what is that identifiable path for every single RCMP or police agency across the country? What does that protocol look like? That's really what I would love us to define, so that we could put forward a really great concrete strategy from this committee moving forward.

That's what I'm looking to you for. Clearly, you've gone through this. You have first-hand experience, and you might be able to help me out. From the time a mother walks into a police agency or a police office and has a conversation, what does that process need to look like? Also, what are the legislative pieces that need to be in place in order to empower her?

Ms. Leah Parsons: Depending on the police officer who they report to, the response is going to be different, so there's the problem right there: it depends on the police officer. Each police officer, if you're going to deal with, for example, an intimate image, is going to have to have some training in how to respond to that. Their personal opinions come into it. It's not just a matter of them saying "this is our policy and procedure." They will actually say, "why were you sharing those intimate images?" The type of language and the way they're received is very important right at the front end, because that's going to determine right there how seriously they're going to take that complaint. Then, again, they need to be aware that there is a law that you're not allowed to share intimate images without permission. Everyone has to be aware of that law if they're going to be dealing with those types of crimes.

If you get past those first two steps and you're successful, I think then it's a matter of having the police go into the schools, because a lot of children I speak to across Canada think it's just in Nova Scotia that it's against the law. I have to explain to them that, no, this is the Criminal Code of Canada, and you are not allowed.... Then all their faces drop. So there's the education piece in the schools to let them really be aware that this is really serious and there will be consequences for their behaviour.

To me, those are the first few steps and those are the first roadblocks that you come across. I have had parents say "the police officer was great and they knew the law and they applied it, and then they made sure that the image was removed immediately." But you could have the complete opposite of that.

● (1725)

Ms. Carol Todd: I would certainly agree with what Leah is saying, that in every province and every jurisdiction it is different. If you go to cybercrime teams and ICE teams, they of course have more information on how to handle certain cases than on how to handle others. We can't deflect any cases that come through. I had a mom contact me just last week who said she talked to Cybertip.ca and there's an image of her daughter, but Cybertip.ca told her there was nothing more they could do because the image was posted on an American site.

There's Canada and there's the U.S., and we know that the U.S. is far bigger and greater and vast, but just because it's an American site doesn't mean that as Canadians we have to stop there, just because it's across the border. That's why Amanda's story is so interesting to hear, because this fellow is across the water. When we talk about legislation and we talk about what we need to do, we're not bound by the waters around Canada anymore. This is the Internet. This is the technology. It brings people to our faces in a minute who are across the world, so we need to talk about that. We have to make legislation meet the fast-growing pace of technology and what's happening around the world that people are facing right now.

In terms of law enforcement, RCMP, it's learning about what technology is doing. It's learning about how to dialogue, how to have those questions, but they're also learning not to be so black and white so that the person who is reporting it feels that they're not valued.

The Chair: Very good.

That's your time.

We're going to go to Ms. Damoff for five minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you both for being here. I understand one of your daughter's memory stones has just made it to Oakville, Leah, and I'm so happy to know that her memory will be part of the culture in my community from now on. I think that's a wonderful initiative, and I'm deeply touched that she will be part of our community forever.

One of you brought up something about cellphones, and it just triggered something with me. We as the federal government actually regulate the cellphone industry, and so much of what we've talked about is out of the purview of what we as the federal government can actually legislate. Do you see any changes that we should be making to cellphone regulations in terms of dealing with cyber-violence and what we're talking about?

Ms. Carol Todd: There are a few cellphone providers in our country. Each one of them seems to have a different platform. One has mental health. Another one has e-health and social media safety. They all need to be working on the same page and the same issue, because they all distribute the same tool.

One in particular that I sit on an advisory board for is doing a really good job in getting information out to families, seniors, and school-age children about smart social media safety. I applaud them for that, because they are the first ones that have branched out. In the United States, it's more vast. They have a bigger population and they're working really well on getting it out digitally also.

We need to try to figure out a way to get information out there to the parents so the parents can provide it to the kids.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do you have anything to add to that?

Ms. Leah Parsons: No, I don't.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'd actually like to share my time with Mr. Fraser.

Do you have some questions, Sean?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Sure. Thanks again very much for coming and sharing your story. Being from Nova Scotia, I'm very familiar with Rehtaeh's case, as well as the incident you mentioned, which was in my community, of the non-consensual sharing just a few weeks ago, and the experience at Saint Mary's and Dalhousie. There's been a bit of an epidemic in Nova Scotia with the mistreatment of women online and in real life, so to speak.

I have very limited time, so I'll focus on just one issue. You both mentioned the need to tell girls that they are enough, that they should love themselves, and that we should also bring boys into the conversation. It sounds to me as though there might be a need for a bit of a public conversation or an awareness campaign. Could you comment briefly on what such a campaign would entail if it were going to help inspire confidence in young women and girls and awareness in young men and boys?

● (1730)

Ms. Carol Todd: I think that nothing is ever enough, but there are campaigns out there by different organizations and companies that focus on girls. We don't talk enough to our boys about how they need to respect females and how they need to behave to be “proper gentlemen”. We need to focus on having our boys listen to that message more and not be that tough guy who can stand up to anything. That's something I would like to see a focus on.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Ms. Parsons, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Leah Parsons: I'd just like to say that as Rehtaeh was going into junior high, I was very well aware of what I needed to teach her as a female to be safe. I went in knowing that she had to know certain things, to be cautious and careful, and to never be alone. I felt that she had her head on straight and she was very cautious herself, so I felt like, “ I'm good”. I had no idea that it didn't matter what I said; she was never safe. She was never safe when she was put in a room and left alone with four males because nobody taught them what sexual consent was.

Even one of the males, after this all happened, reached out to me. He tried to explain to me that he didn't rape Rehtaeh. In his description, he described exactly how he raped Rehtaeh. He clearly was uninformed, and nobody ever taught him what sexual consent actually means. He incriminated himself when he did that, but not knowingly.

It is very important. I think a lot of girls are being told the message, but I don't think the males are getting the message. I don't think people are putting time into the males to explain it to them fully. I see that. I see the brave young boys come up to me after presentations and ask me more questions. It's so brave of them to do that. They want to know.

The Chair: That is a great place to end the conversation for today.

Ladies, I really want to thank you. I want to echo what everyone on the committee has said. I'm sure that your girls would be proud to see how you've kept their voices alive and how you're helping us to end this kind of tragedy for other girls.

Go ahead.

Ms. Carol Todd: Leah and I are often met with roadblocks when we are speaking out to schools or organizations only because no one wants to hear the words suicide and mental health. But our daughters' stories go far deeper than that, and there are life lessons to be learned. For us as parents, it's really frustrating when we get a reply back telling us, “Sorry, we can't have you in our school system or at this assembly because you're going to trigger our kids”. We are far beyond wanting to trigger any child.

If a school doesn't have supports in place to help children or young people with stories like that, the kids are hearing them online, in the newspapers, on the radio, and on TV anyway. I have to say that it hurts us deeply when we are told such things.

The Chair: We certainly would invite your input. If there's anything you think of or would like to submit, having heard the questions, I would encourage you to submit that, along with the pages you didn't have time for, to the clerk.

Thank you again for coming.

Thank you, committee.

Wednesday for our meeting we will have Cybertip.ca, YMCA Halifax, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, and the Canadian Coalition Against Internet Child Exploitation.

We will see you Wednesday.

The meeting is adjourned.