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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): I call the meeting to order. Welcome.

We have excellent witnesses again today on our study of violence against young girls and women.

In this first panel, we have Farrah Khan, who is the sexual violence support and education coordinator at Ryerson University. With her, we have Hannah Kurchik, who is a student advocate for the healing justice advisory committee.

With the Anti-Violence Project, we are pleased to welcome Kenya Rogers, who is a policy analyst at the University of Victoria Students' Society. With her we have Paloma Ponti, who is a volunteer lead.

We will begin with 10 minutes of comments from Farrah and Hannah.

You may begin, Farrah.

Ms. Farrah Khan (Sexual Violence Support and Education Coordinator, Ryerson University, As an Individual): Good afternoon, everyone. We're really excited to be here. We're excited to have been invited by the honourable Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

We are excited to talk about sexual violence on university campuses. Both Hannah and I have been working on this issue. I've been working on it for 16 years, and Hannah has just started her activism. I'm super happy that she is here with us.

Every day in Canada people are sexually assaulted, including trans people, gender non-binary people, women of colour, women with disabilities, and queer and trans folks. Too often these issues of sexual violence are seen as not important or not seen as the crises that they are. Too many times we are hearing survivors on our campuses say that this is just the price of being a woman: that they are sexually harassed coming to and from classes, that they feel they can't say anything or, when they do, that they are turned away or victim-blamed by the institutions that are supposed to support them.

We want to state that we are speaking on unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin territory, that indigenous people are detrimentally affected by sexual violence, and that to talk about sexual violence on our campuses we have to talk about sexual violence in terms of indigenous people. We also have to talk about the linkages between consent on the land and consent on the bodies and really ask that the committee look at the work of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network in talking about this.

When we talk about sexual violence on campus, too often it's seen as episodic. It's seen as a one-time event in someone's life, but the survivors who we work with every day have sexual violence happen to them multiple times. They are sexually harassed going to work. They have been sexually assaulted as children. They are coming to universities having experienced sexual violence in a multitude of ways, yet we make it seem as if sexual violence magically only starts happening at the age of 18. We need to really challenge this idea.

When we make it episodic, it actually makes the survivor think that in their narrative and in the way it happened to them, they should be ashamed or blamed for it happening more than once, and we know that's not true. We know that oftentimes when survivors do go and get support and are not seen as being in that thin, tiny framework of what is a victim, they feel they cannot access service. Time and time again, survivors say to me that they don't feel they can tell the police, that they don't feel they can report for a multitude of reasons, including student debt. Students aren't feeling that they have the money to actually go for it, to make a claim and report. They feel that financially they cannot go forward with it.

As staff people, we also see a huge amount of awareness starting to be raised, especially in Ontario with the “It's Never Okay” plan that has happened, which we're really pleased that Premier Wynne has put through. It has increased awareness on our campuses, yet the service delivery has not increased. We need to actually increase service delivery if we're going to do an awareness plan, and as someone who has worked on violence against women for a very long time, I urge you to do this. It is a huge issue.

The other piece that we see too many times is that survivors are being told that the only way they should move forward is to report to the police. We know that less than 10% of people report to the police when they've been sexually assaulted. We need to move away from the fetishization of reporting to actually talk about the different ways in which survivors can access justice.

One of the things I say all the time to the survivors I work with is, “What does justice look like for you?” That's why we asked Hannah to come and speak today and discuss what justice looked like for her when she was sexually assaulted.

Ms. Hannah Kurchik (Student Advocate, Healing Justice Advisory Committee, As an Individual): Good afternoon, honourable members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

My name is Hannah Kurchik. I'm currently in my third year of a social work degree at Ryerson University. I am a white cis female, here to speak about my experiences around reporting my sexual assault. I want to tell you my story to illustrate how the impact of sexual violence is not only about the violent act but also about the ways in which our current systems fail survivors.

I was 18 years old when I was assaulted. It was within the first eight weeks of university by a fellow student who I was friends with. On university campuses, 80% of sexual assaults are by someone the person knows. Two-thirds are within the first eight weeks of school.

I chose to report this all to the police, because I believed the system was there to support me. Initially I was provided a lot of care and support by the detective on my case. I felt heard. I was assured that justice would be won. This changed not long after I had a meeting with a crown attorney and attending detective. My experience was like night and day. The one supportive detective said, “I've seen a lot of creeps in my day, and your offender isn't a creep.” All of a sudden, it was as if he who had harmed me was in need of more protection than me. The detective remarked that he was crying when he came in with his father.

I was told that if my offender were found innocent, I would get written down as a liar, and if I were assaulted again, it would be on record that I'm a liar. Not only was this incredibly intimidating, and made me question moving forward with the court process, but it also made me feel very unsafe. I felt that if no one was going to protect me this time, and my offender was found innocent, I most definitely would not be protected if it happened again.

Through trauma-informed gender-based violence ongoing training, for anyone who hears reports of sexual violence, be it police officers or Canadian border service officers, subjective comments should not be allowed regarding the offender to ensure to not upset or influence any decisions made by the survivor.

I was told I would be contacted with the outcome of legal proceedings with my offender. Months passed. I was not contacted by anyone. I attempted calling my detective on numerous occasions. I was still left with nothing. When my detective finally answered one of my calls, he informed me that the crown attorney had dropped my case months ago, and with that my restraining order. When reaching out to my victim witness worker months after my case was dropped with no notification, she explained that she had left one phone message. However, she had no paper trail of this.

I was navigating a system, touted as being there to protect me, that in fact turned out to further harm me. I was not told my rights or given guidance or even notifications of the decisions being made in my case. Survivors need to be informed of the processes, possible outcomes, and options in moving forward when reporting sexual assaults to ensure the safety of survivors and to ensure that informed decisions can be made. Having an advocate present at all times would have been extremely helpful, as I really did not know what I was doing.

When reporting my assault to the university, Ryerson security did change some of my offender's classes that were in close proximity to my classes due to the bail conditions. When attempting to access counselling or supports on campus, I was informed there was a six-week waiting list for counselling, and that the counsellor I would be seeing would be the same one my friend was seeing for a completely different need.

When communicating with my peers, I found that there were also no resources specifically for racialized survivors or LGBTQQ12-S.

While in the midst of attempting to navigate the justice system and still attending the same institution as my offender, I needed on-campus supports. Without these resources, I felt for quite a long time that campus was not a safe place for me. It is critical to make services known on campus through a variety of media and to also have these resources specialized for folks who have been subjected to sexual violence.

On a number of instances in which sexual violence would come up in my classes, as I am in social work, I was made to feel uncomfortable and distraught over comments made by the professor and students about victims who lie. Having trauma-informed classrooms is important not just in social work classrooms but all classrooms, because survivors are in all programs and in all teaching settings. This can come from training for faculty that brings awareness of language and micro-aggressions that surround the shaming of survivors.

Since my initial experience, Ryerson has employed Farrah Khan, who has been instrumental in my healing. Every university needs a Farrah Khan and a team of people doing this work.

On March 24, 2016, I chose to tell my story in a *Globe and Mail* video explaining my experiences in reporting sexual assault. It was important to me to bring awareness to the fact that the institutional betrayal I faced was not an isolated incident.

● (1535)

My story is not just a mess-up or an accident. My story is an example of systemic issues that will have an impact on a survivor's life forever. My story is one that resonates with too many survivors, as the video went viral and reached over five million views.

I am not the first survivor who has faced the devastating failure of institutions, including the supposed justice system, to address sexual violence, and I will definitely not be the last if drastic changes are not made now.

Ms. Farrah Khan: On the the changes that we'd like to see, we'll do this really quickly because there are a lot. We'd like to see a human rights intersectional approach recognizing that not all survivors are the same and a one-size-fits-all model doesn't work. We'd like to see things like recognizing rural and northern communities in Canada have unique challenges, and also that trans and gender non-binary folks are experiencing high levels of sexual violence, yet even when they go to the hospital the gender binaries are imprinted even within the sexual assault evidence kits, which are made to be for male and female bodies.

We also see in access to justice that things like what we have in Ontario, which is the access to four hours of free legal services for sexual assault survivors, should be across Canada. We also want to make sure that the institutional adjudication of sexual violence on our university campuses isn't mimicking the failed criminal justice—I wouldn't even call it a justice system—programs for survivors.

We also want to see things like access without fear, a policy to actually not criminalize people of precarious status who are facing violence and making sure they can actually access safety.

We want programs. If you're going to do a program about awareness raising about sexual violence, please make it something about accountability also. It cannot just be about people knowing sexual violence exists, but must also be about being accountable for the sexual violence they perpetrate.

● (1540)

The Chair: I'm sorry, that's your time.

We'll go to Kenya Rogers. You can begin your 10 minutes.

Ms. Kenya Rogers (Policy Analyst, University of Victoria Students' Society, Anti-Violence Project): Thank you, honourable members, for having us here today. Paloma and I are going to share this 10 minutes, so we'll be going back and forth.

I would like to acknowledge the host communities and nations on whose territories we're working, and learning, and unlearning here today. Those are the territories of the Algonquin people. I want to acknowledge this because we at the Anti-Violence Project understand that our work here in addressing gender-based and sexualized violence is inherently connected to our own Canadian history. As we review the TRC's calls to action and continue to decolonize our work, we have to understand this connection. We must remain mindful of these histories, and approach this work with an open heart and an open mind.

Ms. Paloma Ponti (Volunteer Lead, Anti-Violence Project): Finally, we want to acknowledge that the process of creating culture shifts in our communities is messy and often uncomfortable, but it is through sitting in that discomfort that we are able to engage in processes of change.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: My name is Kenya Rogers, and I am a policy adviser at the Anti-Violence Project. I'm a fourth year political science student at UVic.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: My name is Paloma Ponti. I am the volunteer lead at the Anti-Violence Project. I am a second year gender studies major.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: The Anti-Violence Project is the on-campus sexual assault centre at the University of Victoria. We were officially founded in 1998, based on a student referendum. I think it's really important for us to note that we are solely funded by students. In terms of our services, while they're open to the whole community, we're accountable to our student community in a very big way. We're separate from the institution, but a lot of our work is around building relationships with the institution, and hopefully, guiding their work. Some of this has come in the form of sexualized violence awareness weeks, campaigns, that we run. We run free, confidential, non-clinical support for survivors as well as for folks who've caused harm on campus. Currently we're doing a lot of work with our policy process at the University of Victoria.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: Today we're going to be talking about some of our frameworks, as well as sharing some definitions and discussing recent advocacy efforts on campuses across B.C. We're also going to present some of our recommendations for creating communities of consent, care, and respect on post-secondary campuses across the country.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: At the AVP we aim to offer our space to our community by coming from an anti-oppressive intersectional feminist framework. This means that we're always challenging and engaging in a process of opening up our spaces, our dialogues, and our work to include the voices and experiences of everyone. This means recognizing that issues affect different communities in different ways. It also means the act of unlearning of values, beliefs, and behaviours that have caused harm to indigenous peoples and the land.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: We need to think about who falls through the cracks when talking about violence against women and girls. Not everyone fits into those categories of women and men, and statistics show that women of colour, indigenous women, trans women, trans women of colour, and women with disabilities are disproportionately affected by sexualized violence.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: This violence has continued to exist despite our individual responses to it. This is because those institutional responses so often haven't navigated the systemic roots of the violence in the first place. This is what we call “rape culture”. It's important for us to root ourselves in understandings of the language that we're using. Definitions are really important, because a lot of spaces don't actively talk about these things. We're going to define some of the really important words that we think we need to talk about.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: We define “rape culture” as the culture in which we live in that normalizes and glorifies sexualized violence, thereby creating a sense of entitlement to other people's physical, emotional, and sexual beings without consent. This culture is upheld by many different things.

● (1545)

Ms. Kenya Rogers: In the handout you folks have, you will see one of our models that we use in a lot of our education and programming. It is a triangle, and we call this the rape culture triangle. I have used this tool because it's a visual way of looking at the ways in which sexualized violence is upheld in our society. The top of that triangle says “SA“, which stands for “sexual assault”. Everything else floating through the triangle are the things that uphold spaces where sexualized violence can happen. In the middle of the triangle, we're representing some of those systemic and root causes we're talking about. This can be gender expectations, race, class, and sexism. At the bottom are those everyday acts that uphold rape culture, such as catcalling, sexist remarks, rape jokes, and myths.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: Myths are dominant ideas about sexualized and gender-based violence that permeate our society and uphold this triangle. These myths include things like the concept that people are most commonly assaulted by a stranger, when in actuality 80% of sexual assaults happen with someone you know.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: Another really dominant myth is the idea that the most common places that assaults happen are in bars or in the park, when in actuality we know that most assaults happen in your own home.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: The rape culture pyramid allows us to conceptualize the need to re-evaluate our response models. Imagine if we put time and resources into intervention and education, and addressing the everyday ways that rape culture exists in our society.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: We want to define consent. At AVP, we define consent as the mutual, emotional, physical, and psychological understanding between people without the use of force of any kind. You will also see in the package that you have one of the tools we use when we do our consent workshops and when we go out and speak to students. It defines one model of consent. There are multiple ways we can engage in consult, but the six steps are outlined in the handout.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: When we're talking about consent, and a need to focus on consent, we're talking about a need for consent culture. That's a culture in which asking for consent is normalized and expected in all aspects of life, including interpersonal and institutional. It's a culture in which supporting and believing survivors when they tell us they've experienced violence is normalized. It's moving to a culture where the occurrence of violence is exponentially decreased.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: We also have a handout with a glossary, if you folks would like to look over some of our terms more in depth.

With these definitions in mind, we would like to talk a bit about the work that has happened in B.C., where we're from, and why legislation around campus sexualized violence is so important. This work has been happening for decades. Folks have been asking for a lot of the same things for a really long time. Last year, students and advocates dedicated themselves to pressuring the provincial government and calling out their institutions which continually were failing them around issues of sexualized violence, and asking B.C. to be accountable to ensuring that students had a policy that would centre their experiences. This advocacy was instrumental in the development of Bill 23, which is the post-secondary sexual assault and misconduct bill.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: Students fighting for this work are faced by institutional barriers and push-back from legislators every day. Three provinces, Ontario, B.C., and Manitoba, have now taken a stand against sexualized violence, but there is so much farther to go. Students shouldn't have to think about whether they will be protected by a sexual assault policy when choosing which university to apply to, but as it stands right now, there is a severe disparity across the country.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: With all this in mind, why is there a need for federal leadership on these issues? We need federal leadership because we need the campaigns, the resources, and the dialogues to really be across the country. While post-secondary education currently rests in the hands of the provinces, we're not just talking about legislation and policy. We're talking about a culture in which navigating policy and creating policy is commonplace and common sense.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: With all this in mind, how do we create good processes on campus? How do we ensure that our policies and practices are rooted in the complexities of our communities?

The first way that we believe we can do this is by having a survivor-centred approach. Many of the folks who take up this work on our campuses also hold the complexity of being survivors, and we aren't just fighting for a policy, we are also fighting for a seat at the table.

We also have to talk about the many different communities that are affected by sexualized violence and about the fact that survivorship looks different for different blocks of folks. We need to bring those voices into our processes.

● (1550)

Ms. Kenya Rogers: Often the decision-makers on institutional policy are actually those farthest away from the violence that we're talking about, but through bringing in students, front-line service providers, and survivors, not only will our work be better but we can be more accountable and transparent with the work that we produce.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: Similarly, we need policy that addresses ways to work with folks who have caused harm, within processes of accountability. We all hurt people, yet some things in our world are easier to be accountable for than others. If you get into a car accident with someone else's car, you are accountable to them. You get it fixed, pay the money, and you deal with the insurance. You didn't mean to crash the car, but you did. Regardless of our intentions, we have to own the impact of our actions without getting stuck in guilt and shame.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: Our world doesn't actively teach us how to care for each other, and we're always told that we cannot make mistakes. The reason we can sit here is that we were given opportunities to unlearn harmful behaviours, and we need to recognize that and develop it into policy processes.

We want to end by thanking you again for having us here today and for carving out this space to have a conversation about violence that often becomes silenced. This work is complex, and none of us has all the answers, but we can create spaces to collectively work through our questions.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: Allan Wade has said that alongside each—

The Chair: I'm sorry, that's your time. This is the hardest part of the job, especially when you want to hear the answers.

We're going to start our first round of questioning with Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): I'll start by just letting you finish.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: Our last point was that Allan Wade has said, "alongside each history of violence and oppression, there runs a parallel history of prudent, creative, and determined resistance." When decision-makers and front-line workers come together and have platforms to share our experiences of resistance, we believe our response to violence can be stronger and more inclusive.

That was it. Thank you.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You're welcome.

First, I'd like to thank you all for coming.

Hannah, I want to applaud you for coming here and speaking out. I can't imagine what it's like to walk in your shoes, but you're an incredible young lady. It's wonderful of you to be here. It really is.

As someone who has had to go through the system and face all the challenges that you faced, if you were to give us one recommendation that we could undertake as the federal government to make it different for the next person who goes to the police, is there one thing that you can think of?

Ms. Hannah Kurchik: I think the one recommendation is that there is not one recommendation.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's a good answer.

Ms. Hannah Kurchik: Unfortunately, the issue lies within the systemic build of the justice system. The violence is through the language and the phone calls and the opinions. I think that one recommendation I would have is to fund real services and treat this as work, because it is work. We can't just rely on a volunteer basis. We need to fund so that we have more Farrah Khans and teams that support Farrah, so that she's not just doing this alone. Having the funding and addressing the real issues, that would be my recommendation.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think it's getting best practices, too, that can be shared among other universities. You're running an amazing program there, but all the universities.... We have the federal-provincial thing going on here, but if there can be some research around best practices and sharing of best practices among universities and colleges....

You're all shaking your heads. Is that a yes?

Ms. Farrah Khan: I think one of the things that is a little bit scary right now is that we're looking to the United States all the time for its best practices, but we're not the United States. We're Canada. One of the things we've been seeing is that there has already been adjudication on university campuses of sexual violence. What I mean by adjudication is that if you report internally, there is a process. We need evidence-based research of what the best processes are that can be put in place so we're not mimicking a built-broken criminal justice system that has not worked for survivors.

The fear is that survivors will be told they can go through the criminal justice process or they can go through the internal process, but both systems have really harmed survivors. We need better systems in place. We also need sustainable funding for the violence against women movement in general. Right now, you can ask violence against women advocates across this nation and I think they would say that, time and time again, so many of them do this off the sides of their desks with very little funding. If this were an epidemic like Ebola or cancer, I think we'd have a different conversation about funding.

● (1555)

Ms. Pam Damoff: I've never seen anybody tag-team quite as well as you two did, so congratulations.

You mentioned that you did consent workshops. I attended an event at Sheridan College in Oakville a couple of weeks ago, and Leah Parsons spoke. It was an amazing event. They put together a great program on campus, because they were running into sexual assaults on campus, but as I looked around the room I saw it was 95% women who were there. I know one of the things Leah Parsons said is that she educated her daughter but the parents hadn't educated the four boys.

When you do those consent workshops, who are they for and who's coming out?

Ms. Kenya Rogers: Yes, one of the things I will say is that we definitely have recognized that in our own work as well. We run monthly consent workshops, but we also run programs that are specifically looking at building communities of consent with men on campus and folks who identify as men on campus. We also run a program called the UVic men's circle, which is a group that meets bi-weekly to have conversations about consent, about being better allies, and about engaging in accountability processes. A lot of folks who engage in that program will come through our consent program as well.

We've also done work where we have actually teamed up with different classrooms, and they've been told that, if they come and write a paper, they will get—they have to write a paper.... You know, I have lots of feelings about the whole extra marks thing, but we do have some ways whereby we try to make a more diverse group in the room. I think it's also about actually going out to spaces where folks are, meeting people where they are, and being on the ground and talking about these things. That's how we bring folks into the movement.

Ms. Pam Damoff: It's hard because a lot of times the ones who are going to those kinds of workshops aren't the ones who need to be there, right?

Ms. Kenya Rogers: May I say one more thing on that?

One thing that we have done is build relationships with our judicial affairs office. That's where a lot of this work started happening at UVic, recognizing folks who had caused harm and judicial affairs wanting to access transformative processes of accountability. We often actually worked with the folks who have caused harm on campus.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I only have 30 seconds left, so do either of you want to add anything in 30 seconds?

Ms. Farrah Khan: One thing that has been amazing at our campus is that it has been mandatory for every varsity team to take a consent workshop, and that results in the most beautiful conversations that I've ever had with young men. Last Friday I was there until 9:00 with 30 young men on a baseball team, talking about how to hit on a woman and not be a creep, or how to step in and tell your friend that what he's doing is really not okay.

It's also about fostering those conversations.

The Chair: All right.

We'll go to my colleague Ms. Vecchio for seven minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Those were all wonderful presentations.

Hannah, I'd like to start with you, because you do have a very compelling story, as Pam has noted. You went to the police. On campus, was there anything available for you to report to at the time? Are there any of those services available for you to go directly to them and report at that level, to start off at the university?

Ms. Hannah Kurchik: At the time, the only resource I had was Ryerson security, and they gave me a number to call if I ran into my offender.

In terms of counselling, as I said, there was a six-week waiting list and I was going to see the same counsellor that my friend was seeing for a completely different need. It was a really unsafe time for me on campus, not only because my offender was still attending but also because I really didn't know what to do. I really had no support in the classroom, no support in what to do if I did see my offender, and even legally what to do if I saw my offender. They really had no resources, and then Farrah came and pushed things along.

● (1600)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Farrah, could you add to Hannah's statement? I think that sometimes there is that gap and you're not sure which way to go. What services could Hannah today be able to access at Ryerson? What services are available for any victim at this time?

Ms. Farrah Khan: This was an off-campus sexual assault that was to a Ryerson student. I just want to be clear about that.

On campus now, we have my office, but I'm one person for 40,000 students, and that's what we're expecting. We can look at rural communities, and people who are from rural communities know this. I have survivors who are from northern and rural communities who have to travel for two days to get our sexual assault evidence kit administered. That means you can't change your clothes, and you can't have a shower. I want people to think about the reality here. In terms of our campus, people can come to my office, but we've now also done really extensive training with people who are on the front line—so security people, professors, or people in administration—about what to say when people disclose. We need to move beyond just talking about, "This is what sexual assault is", to "Here's what to do when someone discloses. Here are five things to say to someone." Here's a reminder that they have options, and their options don't always have to include the police. I think Hannah was given the police as the only option, and there are other options as well. We're not dissuading people from speaking to the police.

Also, it's naming for students, too, so that they can do an internal process and an external process. That means if they do an internal process, they can report it internally and the university has to go through an adjudication process and do an investigation, or they can report it to the police.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: One thing that we heard last week was regarding the decision by the Province of Ontario—and you mentioned, also, Premier Wynne here—when they were setting up the programs for the university and colleges, it was being looked at specifically, to that group itself, and not looking at any of the outside resources that deal with it all the time as well.

Do you believe there's a way we can start connecting outside community organizations with the violence against women organizations that exist on campuses? Is that something we should be doing or do you think the separation is necessary?

Ms. Farrah Khan: As someone who's been in the violence against women movement for a very long time, I think you have to. I think you have to respect the knowledge of people who have been doing this work for decades and decades, and have been asking for it. I would add to that, it's funding. How do we share funding resources, too? If we start funnelling everything into sexual assault on campuses, we forget that for decades there are people who have experienced sexual violence—when they're children, in high school. We have so many students who are coming to our campuses who have been sexually assaulted as children and then are looking for trauma-informed classrooms because they're not dealing with it at 18 years old. They're dealing with it as children.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Excellent.

I'll move on to Paloma and Kenya. Thank you very much, ladies. You did an excellent job as well.

You were talking about getting involved with the youth. I heard, however, from Farrah how excellent it was working with the men's sports teams or the female sport teams, and I think that's a great start, for sure. As my minister at church would say, it's like preaching to the choir. I think Pam noted that the people who are interested are the ones who show up.

You mentioned that you're trying to get more people, and I agree with you. Don't give marks for coming. It's just about being a good person. What are some of the ways of getting people involved? Let's forget about the marketing, but what are the actual good proposals that are out there?

Ms. Kenya Rogers: One of the ways we have tried to do this advocacy work on campuses to actually bring in folks throughout our community is through a campaign that we run called "Let's Get Consensual". The campaign is slowly moving into a provincial phase, so we have institutions that have signed on from across the province. Basically, "Let's Get Consensual" is about what I was mentioning before. It's a lot about meeting folks where they are, such as parties on campus, big events on campus. We're out there talking about our six steps to consent, signing folks up for workshops if they're into it. We also run a pretty extensive media campaign. It sounds weird to talk about branding and marketing, but I think the reason we've been so successful is it's a really cool campaign and folks recognize it. They see our logo and they know what we're talking about. I think that's been a huge way that we've gotten in. It's little things like every single resident student getting a hanger on their door before they get to school, and it has six steps of consent and six ways you can support a survivor. Their key chains have a little key chain that says, "Let's Get Consensual" on it. Brand recognition that's connected to that culture shift is really important.

● (1605)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Awesome.

Farrah noted on this, when we talked about it, that it doesn't start just because you turn 18.

Is there any way that you see that program—it's now just being done provincially—going down into the younger grades and secondary school as well?

Ms. Kenya Rogers: Yes. Actually we've started that process, but it's hard. Our office has three part-time staff, and Paloma and I work 10 hours a week each. We are really not very well resourced.

That being said, we have started working with a couple of high schools, and Brentwood College has been taking on this work. They have some more or less community leaders—there are about 200 students who we're going to be training in December. That work has started, but I think we need more of a provincial strategy around it for us to have the funding and resources to bring it to the K-12 level.

Also, provincial priorities of bringing it to the K-12 level are really important.

The Chair: All right. That's your time.

We'll go now to Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): I thank all four of you for your vital work and for being such articulate and full-of-heart presenters. It really makes an impact.

I so wish that Jonathan Kay had heard some of your material before he got on *The National* last night. It was really hard to watch him define rape culture in a way that I've never heard. But I digress.

Can any of the four of you talk about the cost to yourselves and to your work of not having the funding at the ground level? We're hearing from many witnesses throughout this study about what is lost when we don't have federal funding for service delivery.

Ms. Hannah Kurchik: To see Farrah, I have to book three weeks in advance. When I see Farrah, she is running to her office. The services she provides, at least to me, from what I know are amazing. It's hard for me to watch her provide these services for all of Ryerson, because it's almost concerning to see someone do so much on campus.

Ms. Paloma Ponti: My job at the Anti-Violence Project is that I'm the volunteer lead. What that means is I'm trying to involve.... At the moment, we're training 15 volunteers. That takes a lot of energy, but that's what we have to do, because we do not have enough staff. We are spending a month training our volunteers three times a week, and all of our energy right now is going to these volunteers. The number of support hours we're able to provide while we're establishing that number of volunteers is significantly decreased. It really hurts us, because we're only able to be open for four hours a day, three times a week for support. That's not enough.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: Just to add to that, it's really hard because we have the interesting position that we're separate from the institution but are out doing this work. The institution is finally engaging in the processes of developing policy. We want to have a seat at the table, just as we said in our presentation, but we have to talk about how we make those seats at the table actually accessible to folks. When I work 10 hours a week at the sexual assault centre, about five of them go to reviewing documents, doing consultation, and going to meetings. That leaves me five hours to do the front-line, on-the-ground work.

It's also about getting folks to the table and resourcing them to be there and acknowledging that their work is valuable.

Ms. Farrah Khan: Recently people have been saying that sexual assault is on the rise or that there is an increase in sexual violence. Someone actually said that to me today about university campuses. I don't think it's as much that it's on the rise as that people are finally listening to the voices of survivors and recognizing that this is a really big issue and that it continues to happen in Canada.

I literally am waiting to get my free trip to Hawaii for the amount of work—I and all of the sexual violence workers—because it's as though we have done so much, in the past two years especially. Because of the Ghomeshi case, we saw a high rate of people starting to come forward and of people saying, “Oh yeah, that happened to me in my workplace”, or “that happened to me in Parliament”, or “that happened to me in my rural community.”

Too often, because there's a limitation on these supports, we see people in these positions run ragged in such a way that we're just holding faith. Every night I go to bed wondering what survivor is going to call me the next day and what I am going to miss—because we're missing things. We're missing things all the time because we can't keep up with the amount of work we have. It's unfair to violence-concerned workers, especially because most of us are survivors and most of us are women, that we have to uphold all these issues, when we're not fully funded the way we should be.

I think that's a big issue, and I'm not just talking about on campus. I think the campus is important, but women are sexually assaulted in their workplace everywhere, and children are. When we don't have adequate funding, what we're telling people is that violence doesn't matter, that our bodies don't matter.

Right now, that's consistently how it feels. I know that's because of the past 10 years of our last government, partially—I'm sorry—but I think it's also speaking to provincial mandates and everybody's mandate. People are scared to have this conversation.

● (1610)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you for being so clear. I share your deep concern that we are welcoming people to reopen old wounds and talk about the most terrible, vulnerable thing that has happened to them, but then do not have the system in place to support that process. That's true in the case of domestic violence, of campus violence, of suicide prevention—all of it. We have a huge responsibility.

It's possible for the federal government to fund this work. It used to happen. Twenty years ago it did. It has retracted to being a provincial responsibility, but you have allies who are looking for that federal leadership.

I only have a minute left, but I'm hoping that you—anybody—can say something about the cost to students of uneven access to justice across the country, if it's not the same at each campus.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: Before we even talk about disparity in terms of policy, we can talk about access in terms of the crisis of student debt that we see right now. I think Farrah really drove home that we have such disparity on our campuses involving folks who are there with $35,000 of debt, and how you engage in these really intense processes and do not have an outline of what it's going to look like, and how we support those folks on campus.

I think we need to start there and look also at that, and then recognize.... I think for me, as a survivor who was sexually assaulted before I ever went to university—so I carried that as a new student.... As we start talking about these things and as we start telling folks that we're going to talk about these things, it is a decision-making.... In my case, when I was applying for school it wasn't talked about at all, definitely.

We are having more conversations. I don't think the violence has changed. I think the conversation has changed. As Paloma said, it has now become something such that, if I were applying for school right now, I would not go to a school at which I knew I wasn't going to be protected, because I know the prevalence of sexualized violence.

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

We will go now to Ms. Ludwig for seven minutes.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming here today and sharing and giving us such deep insight into the situation of violence against women.

We've heard from past witnesses, unfortunately, a consistent theme. You mentioned that about 80% of perpetrators are someone you know and that two-thirds of violence and sexual assaults take place in the first eight weeks. We've also heard themes regarding normalization—the blaming and the shaming.

Ms. Khan, my first question is for you. Would you be able to share with us the list of recommendations you were trying to get through in the beginning, through the clerk?

Ms. Farrah Khan: I'll share them with the clerk. They're like an essay.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: My next question is for all of you. Are there any programs available right now for the caregivers, the people in your positions? There is an expression in caregiving for people who are caring for seniors: who cares for the caregivers?

Farrah, if you're looking after or trying to corral and help out 40,000 students at one time, we can't afford to lose you. You can't get sick. What kind of programs are in place to support you and the work that all of you do? As well, what recommendations would you offer there?

● (1615)

Ms. Farrah Khan: There's a really great program. If anyone has ever dealt with any kind of trauma, *Trauma Stewardship* is a great book to read. It's a program that we have among.... I'm part of a network of people who do front-line work on sexual violence in universities across Ontario. Now we have other members in British Columbia and New Brunswick. We meet and talk. I think we need to actually get this kind of assistance in, because we're creating another silo movement of violence against women. We have the violence against women movement and now we have a silo movement in universities. We have to make sure those are working together. The things we're asking that universities have in place are things we need the violence against women movement to have in place. I think that's my worry with this. All of a sudden I've come from a movement of working with an office of 25 people to being one person. We cannot create that isolating piece.

The other thing to really make sure about is that, knowing that so many survivors go into this movement, we also have to pay people properly. Hannah and I have talked about this at length. There is such a push in universities to have people volunteer to work 10 to 15 hours. These are student survivors oftentimes who are asked to policy speak, support a survivor.... They're exhausted.

Hannah can probably speak to this. How many people emailed you in the first week of that video?

Ms. Hannah Kurchik: I received in total more than 150 emails or messages from survivors. That's just in Canada.

Reaching out, it's almost an obligation to be supportive. Sometimes hearing other folks' disclosure is tough because it can be re-traumatizing. There is that obligation as a survivor advocate to almost speak as if I'm Farrah, who's been in the field for 16 years.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: I have a question, just a follow up to that.

Do you have any idea the rate of graduation for students who are impacted by violence?

When it comes to students who are acting as volunteers and trying to complete their own studies after what they've been through, there must be disproportionate numbers of students who are non-completers of university study.

Ms. Farrah Khan: We see more students who have been sexually assaulted ask for a leave of absence or drop out of university than we see people do so who have been accused of causing harm. That speaks to a lot of what we see in society: the expectation that the survivor will take it on, that the survivor will take care of everyone.

I don't know, Kenya....

Ms. Kenya Rogers: One of the things that is hard about trying to know all of the things about these issues is that, because we're really starting to just bring the conversation to platforms like this one, we are lacking in research around those things. As communities of survivors, we know our realities. We know what our communities are dealing with. Some student-based research has recently come out of the University of Victoria through the sexualized violence response team. I would encourage anyone to look up some of that research because there is lots of information about the UVic context.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: I have one question that I'll try to ask very quickly.

Knowing that most often it's in the first eight weeks, statistically, and knowing that universities and colleges do a heck of a lot of work in terms of recruitment, if any one of you could go back and talk to the students, the guidance counsellors, the varsity team captains, your homeroom teachers from high school, what would you share with them that you'd want them to know for preparing for universities and colleges?

Ms. Farrah Khan: We go in and I talk to parents about sex. How do you talk about sex with your kid beyond condoms and beyond not getting pregnant to actually defining pleasure and how to advocate for your pleasure? A lot of us may feel uncomfortable having that conversation, but I'm more uncomfortable with someone being sexually assaulted. One of the best conversations I've had with parents was, like, "I'm going to have it at the breakfast table. I'm going to talk about it." Sexual health education is the prevention to sexual violence. That is the key.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: I would like to add that we've also developed programming that happens in the first eight weeks of school. We host a sexualized violence awareness week in the third week of September. This year Farrah came and gave an amazing keynote presentation at that event.

Some of the recommendations that are coming out of our policy committee are how we can create programming that happens before you actually get to UVic and how we can talk about consent culture as something that we're trying to create within our recruitment packaging and in all of the things we do.

● (1620)

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Do you do any work with dons in the residences?

Ms. Kenya Rogers: Yes. I'm sure all of us work really closely with residences.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: How much sharing is there of data or any kinds of statistics that are collected among different residences and different schools?

Ms. Farrah Khan: We're talking more, but I think it matters as to the university. Ryerson was like, "Yes, here's all our data; we're not going to be ashamed of the sexual assaults that happen on our campus." Whereas other universities, I think, reported zero sexual assaults on their campuses.

Ms. Kenya Rogers: As was our case.... We had zero, which is not true.

The Chair: Wonderful.

Now we'll go to Mr. Genuis for five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here and for your compelling testimony.

I have a few different places I want to go, starting with Ms. Khan and Ms. Kurchik.

You talked, Ms. Kurchik, especially about the experience of being a survivor and going through the system. I wonder if you could suggest some substantive reforms on the criminal justice side that we might be able to propose.

You talked about better informing survivors, which I think we'll very much take to heart as the process goes on. But there are other possible changes that one could think of, such as changes to the prosecutorial rules in terms of how a prosecutor decides which cases to prosecute and which not. My understanding now is that they consider the likelihood of conviction and things like that. Are there changes that you would propose along those lines, questions and standards of proof, these sorts of things? I'm curious for your perspective on that.

Ms. Farrah Khan : One of the things we like to look at is the Philadelphia model, where they actually have a VAW advocate and community case review, where they actually look at the cases that police have named as unfounded and relook at them to see what actually they could include.

We also think that having informed consent is really important, and Hannah can speak more about that. Well, she did so eloquently say that we don't have all the information oftentimes when survivors are going through the system, so it's actually having an advocate there.

Ms. Hannah Kurchik: Having an advocate would be instrumental in making informed decisions. When I went to the meetings with my crown attorney and the detective assigned to my case, it was the crown attorney, the detective assigned to my case, and me. I was sitting there with two professionals who knew everything about the processes...well, not everything, but a lot more than I did, and it was incredibly intimidating. It was very easy to convince me that I was being taken care of when I really had no idea what was going on and what was the right thing to do and what was the best for me in that situation. Having an advocate present would be very important.

Ms. Farrah Khan: I don't know if people have looked at David Tanovich's work, but David Tanovich and Elaine Craig have some fantastic work. They talk about rape culture myths that are embedded in the criminal justice system, and how within the criminal justice processes, things like Justice Robin Camp said are not uncommon. He said, "keep your knees together" to an indigenous woman who was sexually assaulted.

It's thinking also about how we look at that research and actually implement some of the changes that they've said. I think they're better to look at that work.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Do you think that those changes would make a difference in terms of conviction rates, or are there still a large number of cases which, just because of the standard of proof that exists...?

We know that in a variety of crimes there are guilty people who walk free just because of the way we set the standard of proof. Do you think these types of changes would make a substantial difference in terms of conviction rates or are there additional things that are required?

Ms. Farrah Khan: We have to have trauma-informed courtrooms, too. I think there has been a move to create trauma-informed courtrooms, or even trauma courtrooms. Also, it's how we look at domestic violence, having separate courtrooms for domestic violence. We could look at sexual violence courts. We could look at court support worker programs for sexual assault survivors, so there are not only the four hours of free legal advice, but actually support advocates throughout the whole process.

Do I think it will get better? Yes, but I also think that the criminal justice system is only one form of justice. Can we invest in things and evidence-based research into programs like restorative justice and transformative justice? We've seen at Dalhousie University that has worked really well. We can do better. We can do better for survivors by giving them options.

● (1625)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I think I have about a minute left. I want to build on this issue of restorative justice but also alternative processes that exist on campuses.

Sometimes those processes are criticized by a variety of persons because they function outside of the legal system. What kinds of processes do you think should exist, or is it just a case that whenever something happens, it should be given to the police to deal with?

Ms. Kenya Rogers: What we really have to start shifting our ideas around on is the survivor-centred approach. Processes of accountability still have to be driven by what the survivor wants from that process. One example that I can give from the Anti-Violence Project is that we had students going through the judicial affairs process, through the non-academic misconduct policy that we have at the University of Victoria. Through working with the survivor it was identified that she wanted the person who had caused her harm to go through some sort of process with AVP.

That can't look the same for everyone. There's no formula for it. For us, what it looked like was one-on-one conversations, a workshop kind of work. You folks will see in the package that we gave you the production of a zine. I think it's called “What to do when you have caused sexualized violence”.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's your time.

Now we'll go to Ms. Nassif for the last five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thanks also to the witnesses for their presentations.

Last week, Alexander Wayne MacKay, a law professor at Dalhousie University, gave us a very interesting overview of the terms “sexual assault” and “rape” in our legal system. He explained how these terms have been defined at various levels and how the different types of assault have evolved over the years, depending the needs of society and of the law.

Like many other witnesses, he stated that a change in culture is needed to overcome sexual violence and sexist violence. Although no law can do this, legislation can direct such efforts.

Mr. MacKay later presented a brief in response to a question from a member of my staff. He noted that, even today, the definition of the terms “sexual aggression”, “aggravated sexual aggression”, and so forth do not meet present needs, whether in our legal framework or considering the current views in the society in question.

In your opinion, do our legal terms need to be redefined in order the reflect the different levels of seriousness associated with the terms “sexual aggression” or “rape culture”?

[*English*]

Ms. Farrah Khan: I can answer one of those pieces.

I would love to see us reopen a conversation about HIV non-disclosure and sexual violence, because too often HIV non-disclosure is categorized as the worst form of sexual violence, whereas it is, I believe, a different issue. That's one piece I'd really like us to look at. Right now it's being categorized as aggravated sexual assault, and I think it's a different issue.

As for language, I think we have to look at language use, but it's not looking at the laws just yet. I think it's talking about how we're even discussing and describing sexual violence.

Here's an example. Our media uses words like “tryst” to describe sexual assault of a 12-year-old girl by a 30-year-old man. That was in an Ottawa paper. It was used numerous times in an Ottawa paper to discuss the sexual assault of a 12-year-old girl by a 30-year-old man—I'll just repeat that.

As another example, the most-circulated paper in Canada, *The Toronto Star*, said in one of their articles about a sexual assault, a gang rape of a young man in a club district, that one man's rape is another man's sexual fantasy.

We too have an issue, then, about how we use language and words. There's a guide called “Use the Right Words” by a group called femifesto, which I'm a part of. We looked at the media for five years and the way in which they report about sexual violence.

It's as though we're not in a place to shift the language in our criminal legal system until we start talking about how we as a society, including the government, are going to start talking about sexual violence and taking it seriously and looking at how we shape the narrative of sexual violence.

Yes, give me a part of our criminal justice system, but it's one system.

● (1630)

Ms. Kenya Rogers: In our context at UVic, one of the first things we did when our policy committee came together was to put out a consultation piece to the entire student body, faculty, and staff. The first question on that was something like: The policy committee uses the language of "sexualized violence". What does this term mean to you, and is there any other term that encompasses what you believe sexualized violence is that's better?

It has to be rooted in community first, before we can look at other things. I fear or I am wary of looking at too many terms, because they can create a hierarchy of what sexualized violence is, but as survivors, as folks who experience harm, we know when we've experienced violence. We have responses to that within our body and within the way we are in the world. It's a very complicated thing, but I think it has to be rooted in community first.

The Chair: Thank you. I think that's it.

That was wonderful testimony. Thanks to all of you for your participation with us today. If you have other comments or things that you'd like to have the committee read, please send them to the clerk.

Again, I want to thank you for your help and for all that you are doing to eliminate violence against women in our country.

We are going to suspend for two minutes while we set up the next panel.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Chair: We'll get started.

For our panel discussion, we have guests from the South Asian Women's Centre. I want to welcome Kripa Sekhar, executive director; Reena Tandon, board chair; and Marmitha Yogarajah, project coordinator.

Ladies, welcome. We are pleased to have you testifying to us today. I understand you are sharing your 10 minutes among yourselves. I'll let you go and cut you off at the end of your 10 minutes, so we can begin our questioning.

You may begin.

Ms. Kripa Sekhar (Executive Director, South Asian Women's Centre): My name is Kripa Sekhar. I'm the one in the centre. I am the executive director of the South Asian Women's Centre.

We would sincerely like to thank the committee for giving us an opportunity to present our work in the area of violence and abuse against young women and girls.

SAWC is a multi-service agency that was founded in 1982 by a very committed group of volunteers who tried to support women from the community who were trapped in situations of violence. SAWC works from a feminist, anti-oppression, and anti-racism framework and a gender equality lens. This is reflected in all the work we do, whether it is service delivery or research and policy around this issue.

Like many other communities, young South Asian women and girls also deal with violence and abuse. However, the complexity of these issues makes it more difficult for women and girls to even speak about the abuse. Our experience informs us that the issue of violence against young South Asian women and girls is a continuum. It is connected to their mothers, grandmothers, and previous generations of colonization, as well as the years of socialization and patriarchy. However, these are not exclusionary of each other but intersect in fully understanding the complex layers based on the years of violence that immigrant and refugee young women and girls have difficulty even talking about.

Many are married at a very early age, often through a forced marriage. Along with our new and ongoing work in the area of violence against women and girls within the South Asian communities, the collaborative work we do in the pan-Canadian and international context, including our work with agencies like METRAC, Springtide Resources, St. Michael's Hospital, and We Are Your Sisters, indicates the excellent work based on anti-oppression and intersexual analysis.

We would like to state that there is a commitment to end gender violence against women. We must ensure that this issue is framed from a true gender-based, equality lens. Violence against women and girls needs to be viewed as situated in a continuum of macro- and micro-factors of racism, ageism, classism, and sexism, among others.

Young women are intrinsically part of the larger society, where they are embedded in family networks, peer groups, educational institutions, or other socio-cultural groups and workplaces, which are locations and causal factors of violence. In order to address the issues of violence against young women, it is imperative to consider the role of significant others, such as mothers, sisters, mothers-in-law, employers, teachers, friends, and survivors—both male and female.

Dr. Reena Tandon (Board Chair, South Asian Women's Centre): This is perpetrated [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] who are beholders and enablers of the values that present a different context of violence. While we believe that we need to understand the different forms of violence through the experiential lens of young women and girls, what we can say with confidence and based on our qualitative work and research and our ongoing work with the community is that isolating this issue only makes young women and girls more vulnerable and marginalized. Any best practice guide or intervention would need to take into consideration the important impact that mothers, older women in particular, have on the value transfer and information transfer within a large proportion of the families we work with.

While focusing on young women and girls is valuable, to understand certain specific forms of violence that may be unique to that age group, we need to keep in mind the fact that young women, however we define them, live in very diverse contexts. Young South Asian women who migrate here at an early age, or who come here as young brides, experience violence in very different ways. This often isolates them ever more because they have no immediate family, or the only one they know is the one they migrated with.

● (1640)

We have Marmitha to speak about some of the projects.

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Just to put it into context, in the last two years, SAWC has supported 900 women survivors of abuse. That gives you an idea of where our analysis is coming from. It's very deeply rooted in some very complex issues.

Go ahead, Marmitha.

Ms. Marmitha Yogarajah (Project Coordinator, South Asian Women's Centre): I'm the project coordinator for In My Mother's House, a story of sexual violence, marital rape, and forced marriage, which was funded by Status of Women Canada. I'm going to be speaking a little bit about the project itself.

SAWC recently completed the research phase, which is the first phase of the project, surveying, interviewing, and conducting group sessions with more than 150 survivors. This included young women and girls, and men and older women as well. Our findings revealed that, of course, young women and girls are greatly affected by the issue, but our research revealed much more than just this. SAWC was actually really shocked and surprised to see, through the research phase, that many of the women who were over the age of 45 were also greatly affected by the issue because they were still dealing with the trauma of their current or previous relationships. This particular population of women, we found, seems to slip into the cracks and seems to go unnoticed, and their well-being is often assumed because of their preference to stay silent on the issue. This is typically meant to maintain family status.

Many of the women who SAWC spoke to revealed that they were child brides and they were getting married at the age of 8 to 17 years old to men who were 10, 20, or 30 years their senior. One of our stories included an 11-year-old Bengali girl who got married to a 27-year-old man, and she had her first child at the age of 14. Oftentimes they were abused their entire lives until their husband's death, or until they feared for their own lives and well-being. It was only then that the cycle of abuse ended and sometimes they were still in that abusive situation. Many of these women immigrated to Canada to live in joint families and depended on their husbands for guidance. This heavy reliance on their in-laws stripped them of their autonomy, resulting in little or no financial independence for them, really no access to their legal documentation, and isolation from their own community at large.

What SAWC noticed about this group is that no one really understood what informed consent was and they felt that they were obligated to accept the marriage and to continue to stay in the marriage in order to maintain their family's reputation. Many accepted that this was their fate, governed by patriarchal traditions and adhering to principles of maintaining the status quo, which was to choose a partner for their children regardless of whether or not there was consent. So of course it's important to recognize that young women and girls experience violence and abuse every day as a result of the entrenched patriarchal traditions. But women over the age of 45 continue to internalize their trauma without support. Ideally we need to create an inclusive best practice to support these women and to consider all diverse groups.

● (1645)

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: I would like to continue from there to say that these projects have been powerful indicators of how much work still needs to be done to ensure that the most vulnerable women, who may not be part of any education system, need to feel supported and less isolated.

Imagine a young bride coming to Canada, and she has no access to education. She does not know what rape is. She has no idea that she has the ability to say no. These are the women who SAWC seeks out to try and help. It takes a lot before they decide to get out of that situation.

This is also an indicator that shows the government has an opportunity to do more for the most isolated women, and that includes racialized immigrant and newcomer women, and to ensure inclusion through a process of meaningful and true consultations at the ground level. While at one level we stand together in solidarity regarding a certain universality of experience, to strengthen the focus on young women and issues of violence faced by them, we would like to emphasize that any policy or best practice recommendations would benefit from cultural sensitivity and acknowledgement of the diverse forms and expressions of violence faced by women.

We have four recommendations: recognize that gender-based analysis must encompass the complexity of women's lives who may be outside that academic realm; ensure an intergenerational integration into all best practices; recognize that isolation is a result of inability to participate due to systemic barriers like racism and government systems and processes that are exclusionary; and provide resources and try to ensure that core funding is provided to organizations that do this work.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to begin our round of questioning with my colleague, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Excellent.

Thank you very much to each of you for your testimony, I very much appreciate it.

You mentioned near the end of your remarks about the different challenges that immigrants and newcomers face when it comes to reporting or dealing with the consequences of sexual assault. In my previous life, I had some experience working pro bono with certain immigrant women who reported that their immigration status made it very difficult for them, particularly for those who came through the temporary foreign worker program, to report or do anything about their sexual assault and the consequences thereof, because they felt captive to a single employer, and if they complained, then they faced deportation, potentially.

Can you elaborate on some of the challenges faced by immigrants or newcomers, and what the federal government might be able to do to help overcome those challenges?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: The issue of violence against women is also interlinked to immigration and citizenship, eventually. One of the the things that made it very difficult was the conditional permanent residency, or CPR, which became part of the immigration portfolio. We found many women...it was unbelievable how many women came to SAWC for help, because within the first year of marriage, the marriage broke down. There was a woman who we had to admit into the shelter when she was three months pregnant. She left but she returned to the shelter when her baby was one month old.

These are the types of situations. There was another woman who was turned away at the airport and told that her husband had just said that the marriage was annulled, and she had to be sent back. She was brought to our agency, but her father did not want to continue. She was only 23 years old. She had nowhere to go and no place to stay. We did say we would find her the support she needed, but she recognized it was going to be an uphill battle. She chose to go back home, where she was going to be stigmatized for having been married previously. She was unlikely to find a bridegroom or settle down, and she would have to go through tremendous mental trauma.

I think that's what we refer to when we talk about some of the systems that are in place.

Mr. Sean Fraser: We've certainly identified that this is a major problem, but is the solution to ensure that when newcomers arrive in Canada they have a determined pathway to citizenship and that there's not any kind of temporary or conditional status?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: That is one way, yes, 100%. The other way is to provide supports, like I said, to community agencies so that we can go out to the hard to reach neighbourhoods to find and support the women that need support, and ensure that they have the support they need through education and through training. That's what we do. We provide mentorship training. We have about four groups in a week. We have the seniors group, the wellness group, the sewing group. These are groups of survivors who have come together to work together.

● (1650)

Mr. Sean Fraser: Following up on the need for community support, one of the challenges when I ran into cases along these lines dealing with very vulnerable people is that, had my wife not worked in the civil society sector, I would not have had a phone call to say what's out there in the community, what community resources are there.

Do you partner regularly with people in the justice and law enforcement system and other civil society groups and how could the federal government enhance those relationships or help you enhance those relationships?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: We have had a very good relationship with most of the police who have come into the agency to support us. When we reached out, we had some tremendous support. We also had significant support when we had pointed out certain.... For example, when women have been accused of assaulting men, which is not really true and we know that for a fact, we've been able to work with lawyers to prove that this is not the case. In fact, this is because the person has wanted to deport the woman back to her home country and has tried it in the past.

We have many cases of women being left behind in their home country under false pretenses without papers. We work with the Canadian high commission to try and bring them back. The high commission has been helpful in that respect.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Dr. Tandon.

Dr. Reena Tandon: I'd like to add that, given the patriarchal nature of the marriage, I think the dependence of women on men as spouses and the age difference are the crux of the matter. In terms of the collaboration, it might be useful for us to have some seamlessness in terms of interconnectivity between the different players. Some studies have been done in collaboration with SAWC and organizations like SALCO on forced marriage.

Any funding or any further collaboration to make this documentation more known, to bring the players together, and to take it to the next level, would be very helpful.

Mr. Sean Fraser: That's a natural segue to my next question. You mentioned the patriarchal nature of the relationship. In your earlier testimony, you referred specifically to the need to promote financial independence and access to legal documents, among other things. Are there things the federal government can do to help promote the independence of women in relationships like the kinds that you're describing, whether it's financial, legal, or otherwise?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: The other thing too is we recognize that housing is a major issue. We work very closely with the shelters all over Toronto and the GTA. That's one of the primary issues. We also recognize that women need their own place to stay. The transitional shelters don't really provide enough permanency or structure to a woman who has already gone through abuse.

The other issue is mental health support. There's little or no support for women in these situations because of language barriers, because of the isolation and their unwillingness to talk about these issues. These are some of the areas that you can focus on in greater depth.

Mr. Sean Fraser: We appreciate your testimony. Keep doing your good work.

The Chair: Now we'll go to my colleague Ms. Vecchio for seven minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It's fantastic to have the three of you discuss this with us.

I don't know if you'll be able to answer this, but we talked about the generations and the patriarchal family. Do you find that within the first or second generation maybe the families have not been here long enough to know historical data? Do you find that as families are settled in Canada, we do move away from that for the majority of these families?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Do you want to answer that since you did your research?

Can you repeat your question please?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm looking at the patriarchal values that are brought from the countries. Do you feel that once they've settled in Canada, those are moving away, one generation away, two generations away, or is there is not enough data in history to be able to get that?

● (1655)

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: There are two things here.

One is yes, we were actually talking about doing another project based on the research and looking at the second generation. We have one project providing training on forced marriage as a form of human trafficking. Marmitha has taken that project on the road.

We found that the second generation of women who are raised here are much more aware. Am I right, Marmitha? They're much more aware and they are also willing to talk about these issues, but many of them are still structured within a family framework. I can say confidently that at least 50% of them want to please the family members when it comes to marriage and those kinds of decisions. The South Asian families are very close-knit. It's not just the family, but you marry into a larger joint family system as well.

Dr. Reena Tandon: I can quickly speak to that as well, and Marmitha was going to say something.

What we have is anecdotal evidence. We are going by the work that SAWC has done based on our case studies. I'm at Ryerson. The first generation project at Ryerson is in general and not just on South Asian background. I speak to the South Asian women who I happen to associate with sometimes and with our students. We are emphasizing the continuum because the family is the cultural core.

The continuity and the transmission of values is a major family project. As we know that transferring the values—as in the values of patriarchy, with women being the beholders of those values—is a very strong string that we see. It is the value system that keeps women from speaking, so the violence is embedded within the conversations. I'll give you a quick example. Olivia Chow is a visiting professor. We have the Jack Layton Leadership School. I was facilitating a group of women, and nine out of 10 women, when they were telling their story of wanting to be leaders, wanted to somewhere address sexual violence and gender-based violence but found no way and broke down into tears. It is this unspeakability woven into our systems which is intergenerational, for sure, that makes these moments very crucial.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely.

Go ahead, if you have something to add.

Ms. Marmitha Yogarajah: Speaking to what Reena said, the second generation don't necessarily have language barriers and they are able to navigate the system. However, that doesn't necessarily mean they are not isolated and tied to their family values. During the process of interviewing, surveying, and doing our workshops and group sessions, I spoke to a young girl who was raised here. At the age of 17, after graduating from high school, she knew that the first thing that would come to mind was marriage, and she was forced into a marriage. Even though she knew the language and was able to navigate the Canadian system better than her parents, she was still stuck into the situation of forced marriage. She wasn't able to escape the situation until she was well into her late twenties.

I think extreme isolation is something that is, as Reena said, woven into the family values. Sometimes being settled here is not necessarily going to make it easier for them.

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: I will give one more example. A number of young women have approached us. We run the youth group in a different way now. We do more mentorship, one on one, trying to build leadership in different ways. Previously we used to meet them. One of the things that came out was, “I have to get back home because both my parents are going to work, and I have to take care of my younger siblings.” The oldest girl child becomes the mother of the family and assumes that role. She does not have the privileges that her peers have. That was a moment to remember for me because I thought to myself that this child, like many of the girls in that age group, do not have time to play or do the things they want to do...or had grandmothers who were brought in for the same purpose.

● (1700)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I have about a minute left with one question. I'm looking at what we're talking about here. We are seeing the difference between.... Some of them will recognize their cultural obligations. Some will recognize the legal grounds that we have here so that this wouldn't have to happen. But I do understand that strong family ties can be a big issue.

How do you target these women who are in your communities in the GTA? Is it that someone comes in and says here is a specific case, or do you go out into the cultural centres and try to have these conversations?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: You would be surprised how most of the clients come to us through word of mouth and referrals and even through agencies from the government, from doctors, from police officers who refer them to the South Asian Women's Centre. They come from as far away as Ajax, Brampton, Scarborough, etc. We have one office in Scarborough and Markham where a worker works three days a week.

I hope that answers your question.

The Chair: Yes, it does, and that's the end of the time.

We'll go to Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you for your work. You seem like a very good team. Thank you for testifying to our committee.

This isn't specific to violence against young women and girls, but in some communities we're hearing among refugee children in the school system that they are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder but are not finding that the schools really are equipped to help them with it. Is that something you're seeing in your community also?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Yes.

Dr. Reena Tandon: You bring up a very important point here, which we have been talking about in terms of the continuum. The earlier team was testifying from the university perspective. I think at the school level in gender they would like to point out that we need to redefine the language of violence. What is identified as violence is very...the pervasiveness of the forms of violence need a different language, we feel, in our context.

It is hard to label it, hard to name it. The school level is where the preparation and the identification can begin, so that when students come to the university they're a little more prepared.

But definitely at the school level and the teenage level the services are lacking. Maybe the guidance counsellors need.... There are so many gaps that can be filled.

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: The other thing is that we have served a very large Tamil population. They have fled oppression and war. We have served the Bangladeshi community. We continue to serve those populations, as well as the Tibetan community and Arabic-speaking communities and Pakistani communities. Many of those communities have also fled oppression and come to this country with a lot of trauma; trauma as a result of the oppression they have fled, but also trauma as a result of not being able to fit in.

In fact, SAWC did a mental health study on suicide a few years ago. We looked at a particular community, the Pakistani community of young people in the age groups of around, I would say, 16 to 25. It was a very small study of 200 young people. We found that many of them were suicidal. Many of them faced some form of depression. Many of them needed mental health supports. It was all related to the fact that they had been displaced from their home country and had to come here.

Those are serious issues. We have not addressed anything in our paper, because we only had 10 minutes. If we had to tell our life story, it would take 34 years to tell it to you, but that's all we could do in such a short time, because there are so many issues embedded within.

It's surprising that so many women have said to us.... We've sent them to shelters, and they've gone back to the men. We've asked them as a follow-up what the reason is, and they have said, “He's the only security I know.” I think that's a sad story for all of us, and we need to address it very quickly, if we truly want to the address the issue of violence against women and eliminate all forms of violence against all women.

● (1705)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: We share your wish.

Can we talk a bit more about domestic violence shelters? Do you have enough space? Do you have enough funding? Is there sufficient housing for the women who leave violent relationships to move and have that permanency?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: We are not a shelter. We are a centre, but we work closely with shelters. Quite often we are told there is no space in one shelter, so try another shelter. We go to central intake and then, of course, we get the runaround.

It's very hard sometimes to find enough space. I think shelter space has to be increased, but more important than transitional housing is some form of permanent housing for women who have gone through this kind of abuse. They need a place where they can raise their children and can live in peace. I think that's something that can be concretely done.

Dr. Reena Tandon: A lot of South Asian women in that age group are also family women. To substantiate what Kripa is saying, they're not single women. Quite often they have married at an early age and have the responsibility of children, which makes it harder to leave but also harder to stay away from violent situations or a relapse into the situation.

Marmitha, do you have anything to say?

Ms. Marmitha Yogarajah: No, it's okay.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: We can get into that intergenerational impact. If these young girls are exposed to the domestic violence that their mothers are receiving, then that can scar and traumatize them, as well.

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: It's a cycle.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: We've heard from other witnesses about their wish that the education system was more informed about trauma and more able to support both young boys and young women around appropriate behaviour, especially when the family unit is not intact. Can you talk more about your hopes for that?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: I think the education system is a critical factor, and it's a critical piece of this whole issue. The issue is getting people into that educational system, growing them through that educational system, and understanding the complexities that occur as a result of young South Asian women and young South Asian boys who go through the system, who meet with their peers, and who have a different conversation than what they have at home.

You know, there are mixed conversations that go on, and that can lead to conflict and trauma. Very often, the Children's Aid Society is brought in because children are told that if your parent gives you a slap, you can report it. We have seen these sorts of cases. SAWC has worked with the Children's Aid Society to try to reunite families, because both the children and the parents have been so completely isolated in these situations. We have to look at that. That's why I say these are not exclusionary processes. There has to be a way to reach all of the factors and all of the players; otherwise, you're going to only maybe catch on one issue and still not fix the other.

The Chair: Thank you, that's great. That's your time.

We're going now to our final questions.

There are seven minutes for Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Witnesses, thank you so much for your testimony, for answering the questions, for your work.

My question is more related to the research and the data. We've heard from many witnesses at the committee that there is a lack of research and a lack of data, and I would assume that there is even more of a lack of data when we look at Asian immigration in Canada.

You indicated earlier that you had 900 cases. Do you have data on that with age groups? Do you also share some of that data with other Asian groups, maybe in Toronto, or in other centres across Canada? What role can the federal government play to facilitate that gathering and sharing of data nationally?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Here's the thing that we do, and we do it best. When a woman walks in through the door, first of all, we have to make sure she's comfortable to disclose her issue. Then we do what is known as an intake and an assessment. Based on the assessment, we look at the number of units of service she needs. Does she need legal support? Does she need help, whether it's to do with her immigration status, or whether it's to do with her family or family law? Does she need support with shelter? Does she need financial support?

We look at all those issues, and then staff members start doing the referrals. These women are then referred out. Their case file remains with us, because women follow up, but we make sure that they are provided appropriate services through the appropriate agencies. Many of them come back to us and say, "I'm not happy at this shelter," or "I am not happy with this lawyer." Then our place is to try to find them someone who they can work with.

Some cases have been resolved. Some cases are not yet resolved. Some cases are just...I don't know what's going to happen to them. Those 900 cases that I talked about over the last two years vary. Some women come in and say, "This is what my husband is doing to me. What should I do?" From planning an exit strategy with them, if they want to leave, to dealing with assisting them through that process, that is how we work. Our counsellors have all the casework in place. We have not yet documented each and every case, because it is very hard to do, but we have a number of stories that we are prepared to share with you.

● (1710)

Dr. Reena Tandon: I would like to add that we really are encouraged by the suggestions that have been asked of us for the changes the federal government can make. This is very encouraging. As I said earlier, we have a lot of anecdotal evidence, but...some resources and maybe a working group, where someone like Kripa can be at the table for a sustained period of time to look at the indicators of violence coming out of these cases, at what the forms of violence are, how we can analyze the policy. Unlike the earlier group from the universities, who are more organized and more textual or academic in their approach, community organizations are the holders of this knowledge and wisdom, but I think we need to bring them to a table where these cases can be analyzed vis-à-vis the federal policy and the gaps. I think this is what they're identifying here is the next working group. We can do our best to give examples one after the other, but if we are really serious about this, because there is so much information available from the grassroots, we can really go to the next step.

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Okay. I'm also going to very quickly touch on the work we did with St. Michael's Hospital. We were called in to work with St. Michael's Hospital. They got a grant to work on looking at the issue around the girl child, the girl baby, the sex selection abortion. We worked on that issue and the results were startling. I have been interviewed by media. There is data collected on that. We talked about the fact that in many of these instances, women did not have a choice, and when they conceived their second or third child and it was known to be a girl, they were probably coerced into having an abortion. So the issue of choice stops there.

We work in collaboration with a number of partners who also hold part of this research.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

We've heard from many witnesses about educating men. Do you have a program to look at educating Asian men? You might not be able to share it all today, but if there's something you could share with the committee at a later point, it would be beneficial.

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Some of the things we did when we were doing this project and a previous project were to bring young men and fathers into the room. We had separate sessions with them to talk about how they would support their daughters or their spouses. Some of the results were startling. Some of the young men said, "Well, we have to be the protectors of our sisters." We wanted to have that conversation. It was important to have that conversation. The fathers also talked about the fact that they needed to be.... So we have tried. We are trying to create a men's group. The issue again is the time of work. We support men through other ways, one-on-one counselling. But it is about their work. Many of them are in shift work. Can they come for a group? Are they able to meet? Punjabi Community Health Services, I believe, has a support group for Punjabi men. We would like to have one for a wider group of men. That is one of our goals.

● (1715)

Dr. Reena Tandon: I think there is a lot of collaboration possibly with the White Ribbon campaign, organizations such as that with community leaders, young professionals, and talking about it at the level of gender equality. SAWC has its own reference of the ways in which they want to work [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Mr. Marc Serré: You said you had a lot of other recommendations. Please share them with the clerk. Thank you.

Dr. Reena Tandon: And thank you so much for being patient.

The Chair: Ladies, we thank you for your testimony. It was excellent and I definitely want to hear more from you. Thank you for joining us today.

We have a bit of committee business that we're going to go to, so we'll turn the cameras off and we'll see you again sometime. Thank you.

Committee members, I just want to let you know that we did get some late cancellations for Wednesday. You saw that there's some committee business.

Ms. Malcolmson has brought two notices of motion which normally require 48 hours, but we really don't have 48 hours before the Wednesday meeting. She'd like to do an oral presentation which means she can read the motions but we won't debate them today. We would then be talking about them and voting on them on Wednesday.

Ms. Malcolmson, perhaps you'd like to go ahead.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

I have copies that could be passed out, and yes, absolutely, the intention is to read this out loud today and then have the discussion and the vote in accordance with appropriate notice.

The short one I'll say first. This is following up on our gender-based analysis recommendations:

> That the Committee invite the Minister of Status of Women, the Honourable Patty Hajdu, as soon as possible so that she can present and explain the government's official response to the Committee's report entitled, *Implementing Gender-based Analysis Plus in the Government of Canada*, and that this meeting be televised.

The second motion is one that I understand is consistent with a motion that has been passed by PROC and is starting to make its way through the other committees, to make sure that there's a common understanding for the rationale for going in camera, which we discussed informally as a committee, but it seems that it might be a good practice to consider formalizing it. The motion is:

> That the Committee may only meet in camera for the following purposes:
>
> (a) to consider wages, salaries and other employee benefits;
>
> (b) to consider contracts and contract negotiations;
>
> (c) to consider labour relations and personnel matters;
>
> (d) to consider a draft report or agenda;
>
> (e) for briefings concerning national or parliamentary security;
>
> (f) to consider matters where privacy or the protection of personal information is required;
>
> (g) to receive legal, administrative or procedural advice from the House of Commons Administration;
>
> (h) for any other reason, with the unanimous consent of the committee; and
>
> That the Chair may schedule all or portions of a meeting to be in camera for the reasons listed above; [and]
>
> That any motion to sit in camera shall be subject to a debate where the mover, and one member from each of the other recognized parties, be given up to three minutes each to speak to the motion; and that the mover shall then be given up to one minute to respond.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: All right.

For Wednesday's meeting the committee business will be to debate these motions, to review the draft letters for lighting the Peace Tower, and to have a discussion about what we are going to study after we finish this current study on violence against women. So think about that.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: On that note, concerning what we may study next, I prepared a motion that I haven't circulated to the group yet because I want to tinker with it a little. The general theme behind it was really pulled from what I saw as the most common theme that we raised at the outset, which we haven't yet studied, which is really matters of promoting women in the Canadian economy. I've broken it down into a handful of sub-groups, such as corporate boards, leadership in government.... I forget all the sub-categories off the top of my head, but I plan to circulate the motion.

Perhaps as a courtesy to the committee we won't have to vote on it on Wednesday, but I'll circulate it ahead of time in case we have time for that discussion.

The Chair: Great. I would encourage the rest of you as well to put your thinking caps on.

Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Chair, could I ask you to clarify the next study area item of business for Thursday? Is that a discussion, or are you anticipating a vote and a decision at that time?

● (1720)

The Chair: No, it would be a discussion. I would expect that people will come with various ideas. It's possible that people might come with a motion. The first time we had a discussion about what we might want to talk about, there was a motion brought that had a cornucopia of items with violence against women, and we did end up voting on that one, I believe.

The intent is to have a discussion, and it doesn't have to be final, but if someone wants to bring a motion, that's acceptable.

We will see you on Wednesday.

The meeting is adjourned.