HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

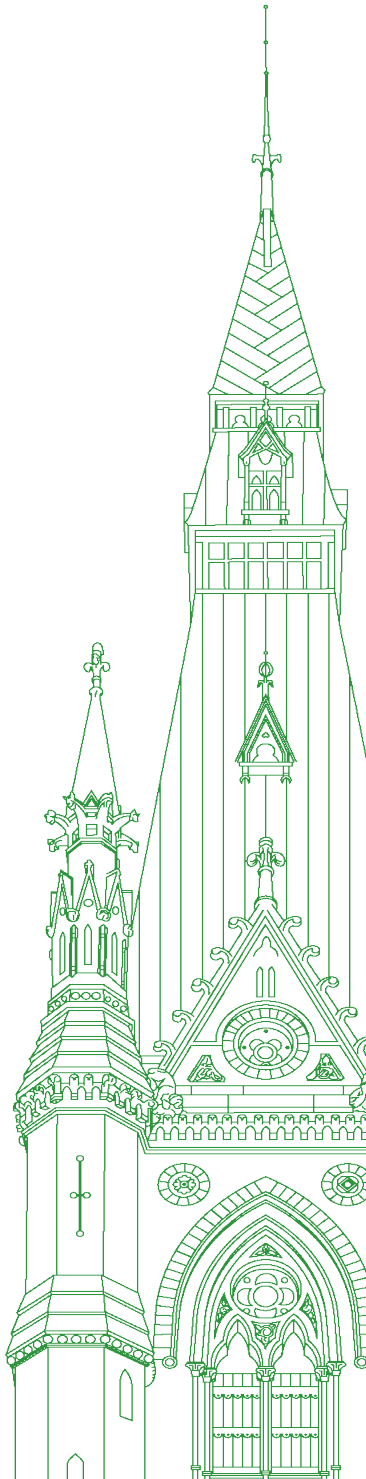
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 009

Tuesday, March 22, 2022



Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

● (1555)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number nine of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I recognize that some people are still taking their seats, but my opening remarks should give them enough time.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Tuesday, February 1, the committee will resume its study of intimate partner and domestic violence in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person must not have symptoms, are to maintain two-metre physical distancing and must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when you are seated. You must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the entrance of the room.

[*English*]

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French audio. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will ensure that interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. To those in the room, your mike will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. I would remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide this trigger warning. We will be discussing experiences related to violence and assault. This may be triggering to viewers with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or if you need help, please advise the clerk. Thank you very much.

I want to let you know, because we are starting a few minutes late, we will be proceeding longer to make sure we get as much time with the witnesses as possible. We will be going longer and past our time to achieve this. I will be messing around a bit today so we stay on top.

I would like to introduce our first panel for today. We have, from the Battered Women's Support Services, Angela Marie MacDougall, who is the executive director. From Possibility Seeds, we have Farrah Khan, who is the executive director. From the South Asian Women's Centre, we have Kripa Sekhar, executive director.

I will be providing you each five minutes to give your opening comments. In the last minute, I will be putting up a little sign that reads "one minute".

We are going to pass the floor over now to Angela for five minutes.

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall (Executive Director, Battered Women's Support Services): Thank you very much, and thank you to the committee for this opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Angela Marie MacDougall. I am the executive director of Battered Women's Support Services, also known as BWSS, and I am so honoured to be here on behalf of our wonderful team of volunteers, staff, leadership, board of directors and, most definitely, the 18,000 victims and survivors who access our services annually.

We are an organization focused on ending violence that takes action through community-based interventions. As well, we provide direct services for victims and survivors of a range of gender- and relationship-based violence, including intimate partner violence and sexualized violence. Our work extends into education and training as well as a number of different activities that we do on education and prevention. Our efforts also involve legal advocacy, community legal education and law reform wherever the law intersects with gender-based violence. Our research and policy work examine root causes. We're always looking for solutions to address GBV, gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence.

As a regional organization based here in metro Vancouver, British Columbia, also known as the traditional territory of the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh people, BWSS has had the opportunity to hear from our communities about the similarities and disparities in services and supports all across British Columbia and in Canada.

My remarks today are to examine the deeper dimensions of the impacts of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence. As our founding women recognized, intimate partner violence takes place not only between two individuals in isolation but rather in a social context and within a world view that systemically reinforces the power of some people to oppress others.

We echo the most excellent recommendations that have already been put forward to the committee in previous sessions. We want to underline and emphasize that previous witnesses have recognized the need for a whole-of-government, cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional approach to addressing gender-based violence. This approach could be accomplished through a national action plan on violence against women and gender-based violence.

We are one of the over 40 organizations and advocates that contributed to the development of the road map for the national action plan, and as co-chair for the “support for survivors and their families pillar”, I want to really emphasize the important work, the road map, which I understand the committee has received from Women’s Shelters Canada. We want to urge the committee to promote timely action on resourcing the implementation of the national action plan and the over 100 recommendations that have already been set out in the report.

While this is an important framework that gives us an opportunity to really tackle the root causes of gender-based violence and to lessen the systemic inequities that allow gender-based violence to continue unabated, I want to emphasize today some crosscutting recommendations and areas in particular that I think we should focus our work on.

As you probably know, today is the day after March 21, which is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. At BWSS, we serve all survivors, including trans and cis survivors. However, today I wish to make visible the experiences of indigenous, Black, newcomer, immigrant/refugee and racialized survivors so that we understand and are thinking about the ways in which anti-violence service provision, advocacy and government policy can centre the very unique realities for survivors.

Every day during the pandemic we have been witness to the escalating racism that indigenous, Black, Asian, Muslim and other racialized communities, especially racialized women and gender-diverse people, experience. We ask the committee to better understand and raise awareness of the experiences of indigenous, Black, newcomer, immigrant/refugee and racialized survivors in order to enable them to access formal and institutional responses to gender-based violence.

What you might not know is that as an organization that's been delivering services for the last 40 years, we have been very careful to focus on specialized supports. As a result, we've heard from survivors that they understand most profoundly that, for us, it's very important to understand that racism exists and that survivors experience it.

● (1600)

I'd like to urge the committee, through your investigation, through your recommendations and through the actions that come out of this work, to respond to gender-based violence through working to end racism. We know it's challenging, but it is necessary.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. MacDougall.

I am now going to pass the floor over to Ms. Khan.

Ms. Khan, you have the floor for five minutes, and at one minute I'll start giving you the wave.

Ms. Farrah Khan (Executive Director, Possibility Seeds): Thank you so much.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that this conversation is taking place across traditional territories of many indigenous nations. I am currently on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, the Anishinabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, now home to diverse first nations, Inuit and Métis people.

My name is Farrah Khan. I've spent 25 years raising awareness about the intersections of gender-based violence inequity through education, policy, art creation and advocacy.

I am currently the executive director of Courage to Act, a national project to address and prevent gender-based violence at post-secondary schools through my company, Possibility Seeds. I also run a sexual assault and gender-based violence centre at Ryerson University.

I am really grateful to speak to this committee, because gender-based violence, specifically domestic violence, intimate partner violence, has been on my mind as I've witnessed time and time again survivors struggling under the pandemic. This is the second pandemic that we're living in.

We know that domestic violence, intimate partner violence, is rooted in gender inequality, power and privilege. It's a manifestation of patriarchal violence, and it intensely impacts the communities we live in.

One thing that isn't talked about enough is the fact that it affects young people in disproportionate ways, more than any other age cohort. What we know is that three in 10, or 29% of women between the ages of 15 to 24 years of age, have reported being subjected to intimate partner violence in the past 12 months. The rates are even higher for people within that age group who are part of Black, indigenous, racialized communities, women with disabilities and 2SLGBTQ people.

When we think about who is a domestic violence or intimate partner violence survivor, we oftentimes do not think of that 15- to 24-year-old age group, but we are missing out when we don't.

It's really important to note, too, that these conversations are binary and that trans qbe gender non-binary people experience a high rate of IPV and physical, sexual and psychological harm, at 1.7 times higher than cisgender people.

I agree with Angela, my colleague, who says that we need the national action plan to happen. We need it well resourced, and we need to move quickly, because this is a pandemic in and of itself. We need to act on the recommendations of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

We need to centre the voice of survivors and the work of grassroots movements and remember that we leave no one behind, because oftentimes when we think about who is a survivor, we focus on the needs of white cis women, and we know that's not true because across the country so many women, girls, men and boys are experiencing this type of violence. We can't leave behind trans abd gebder non-binary people or two-spirit folks, because no one deserves this.

We have to challenge the narrow definitions of what domestic violence is to ensure that no survivor who is experiencing something like forced marriage, stalking, harassment online or intimate images being shared is shut out of accessing services and feels like they cannot reach out for support.

We need disaggregated data that talks about race, gender and sexuality so we understand the scope and ways in which it impacts diverse communities.

I don't know about you, but I want action about housing. We have a huge unaffordable housing issue in Canada, and it breaks my heart when survivors say they cannot leave this violence; they have to live in it because there is nowhere for them to go.

We also have to address food insecurity when we know that it disproportionately affects women and that right now we are in a food crisis. People, again, will stay with an abuser because they can't afford to leave.

We also have to look at income security supports and social protection so that no one has to think, “If I have to pay my rent and pay my bills, there is no way I can leave this abusive situation.” We keep women, girls and people inside abusive relationships by not addressing income security.

We have to continue affordable child care, because people are able to afford to pay for their children to be in child care now so that they can get out of abusive relationships and stay out.

We need to provide grants, not loans, to post-secondary students, to ensure that they are able to go to school and not feel that they're reliant on abusive family members, community members or partners to address the needs they have for education.

I would also state, implement Keira's law. That child should never have been killed, and a private member's bill that would expand judicial education to do good seminars on intimate partner violence and coercive control needs to go forward.

I say, too, that the last piece that we need to address is the criminalization of intimate partner violence survivors. Just this past month, Tanner Brass was found dead hours after police arrested his mother, Kyla Frenchman, when she argued with them about her son's safety. The boy's father, Kaij Brass, was charged with second-degree murder.

● (1605)

The police could have prevented this, but instead they criminalized an indigenous mother, and her son was killed as a result. We need to do better. We need to stop criminalizing survivors, especially Black and indigenous survivors.

We also need the government to invest in nonpunitive approaches and divest from carceral approaches for addressing domestic violence. We can no longer look at the approaches that we have been taking, because they're not working. We need to change this.

Lastly, we need to invest in young people, because young people experience high rates of violence and they're not protected right now.

Thank you so much.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Between speakers, we just had a little note here.

Ms. MacDougall, there's a bit of an issue with your blurred background. I guess it's causing a bit of a connectivity issue, so while Ms. Sekhar is speaking, perhaps you can work on that.

During this time, I'd like to switch the floor over to the South Asian Women's Centre. Kripa, the floor is yours.

Ms. Kripa Sekhar (Executive Director, South Asian Women's Centre): Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to speak. I appreciate the time you've given me. Thank you so much, each and every one of you from the standing committee, for listening and hearing the voices of the South Asian women I have been trying to represent through many years of work. This is 40 years of service within the South Asian community.

I'm not going to repeat a lot of what has already been said, because so much has been statistically informed and I do not wish to waste my time further on that. Rather, I'll focus on what we have found at the South Asian Women's Centre.

We were founded in 1982, and we have served over 900 women in abusive situations in the past three years. When I say abusive situations, I mean they have come; they have reported, and many of them don't even get out of that situation.

When we talk about intimate family violence or intimate partner violence, we understand that within the South Asian community, it reflects an issue between two spouses. Very often, women in the South Asian community will say that's what they were destined for. There's almost a fatalistic unwillingness to accept this issue or to even try to complain about it.

I have presented my paper, so I'm going to focus more on the impact of this pandemic and what we saw coming out of it.

SAWC would like to focus on the condition of South Asian women during COVID-19. We feel that the issue of recovery cannot be trivialized, as it will take years for women to get over the traumatic consequences of heightened abuse because of isolation and so many other factors. It's across all ages. The barriers that South Asian women across all ages and genders face include racism, language, death, grief, access to housing, health, transportation, income security, child care, immigration status, etc.

We always talk about this, but COVID-19 magnified these issues. This was apparent based on the numbers of women who sought help during this time. Our offices were open all through COVID, because women from the South Asian community have very unique needs. Many of them do not have access to computers and do not know how to read and write English. Therefore, we needed to make sure there was an ability to communicate with them, which is why we stayed open. We also took care of all the public health care needs, including hosting vaccination clinics.

Between April 2020 and December 2021, SAWC's seven counsellors received over 4,000 calls, and approximately 900 of them were related to abuse.

The focus of this brief is to look at the intersectionality between gender, poverty, mental health, trauma and immigration status. SAWC has been struggling with questions related to these issues coming out of COVID.

We know of at least 10 to 15 cases of women where spouses lost their employment and returned to their home country because they didn't know what else to do. Many of them were employed as taxi drivers, restaurant workers or even small business owners. Most of them lost everything during COVID. Men decided to return to their home countries, essentially deserting their spouses and children.

Many women are not fluent in English and have never had a job. SAWC spent hours filling out application forms to get women some financial help. SAWC's food bank saw an increase in clients, but the South Asian community, as well as the Daily Bread Food Bank, helped us to fulfill many needs. A couple of men who went back home even remarried, completely abandoning the women to fend for themselves, along with dependent children.

There is an intergenerational impact to this. Most of the women do not know how to use a computer and have no access to one, so the issue of online schooling was really tough for them.

● (1615)

Isolation did not allow for any kind of personal support system. SAWC received calls from the same women four to five times a day because of desperation.

SAWC also struggled with international students.

There are three main recommendations I want to make. One is for adequate and core funding to organizations that is more permanent—not like a contract agreement—and will be more core for several years so that we can actually look at the needs of BIPOC women to enable them to live free from abuse, have stable financial security and ensure proper housing, child care and employment.

The second is for senior BIPOC women to have access to long-term care support, adequate income support and housing support.

The third is for women who have been deserted by Canadian men in their home countries to be granted some temporary permanent residency status to enable them to seek justice.

The Chair: Thank you so much. I really appreciate that.

We're now going to start going on our rounds. I will be interjecting at your time because the time is so tight today.

I'm going to pass the floor over to Shelby.

Shelby, you have the first round of questions, for six minutes.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you.

First I'd like to acknowledge my sincere thanks to all of you for taking the time to speak to us and enlighten us with your backgrounds and on what you're doing to help.

Perhaps I'll start with a first question for Farrah from Possibility Seeds.

Is there a way you can promote or are you already promoting healthy relationships among young people? So much of this is rooted in how we begin.

Ms. Farrah Khan: I love that question.

We know that 71% of university and college students have said they have experienced or witnessed gender-based violence and specifically sexual violence and intimate partner violence, which is devastating.

That says we're making a huge mistake when they're growing up in our high schools and our grade schools. We know there's not comprehensive sexual health education, which includes relationship education. People get really stuck on the sex part of it and forget that most of it is about relationships, consent, body autonomy, respecting your partner and caring for your partner.

This past week there was a TikTok trend that teenagers were making that had young men saying the ways they would kill their partners on dates. It was a trend that went viral. It was depressing to watch and heartbreaking.

When we don't have comprehensive sexual health education that includes healthy relationships—which we don't; it stops after grade 9 and you usually have to opt into it—we create this problem ourselves. We create violence that continues when we don't have real education for children and youth.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

Is there a way our teenagers are being notified? How are they aware? Is it on all the different social media trends? Is it just TikTok, Instagram or what have you?

Is there an informative, educational way to make sure that these young teenagers are aware of exactly what a healthy relationship means? It's interpreted very differently for different people.

Ms. Farrah Khan: Absolutely.

We know that if we don't have that education, the violence continues. We need to have comprehensive education in all grade schools, from K to 12. It shouldn't be a partisan issue.

Oftentimes this conversation becomes partisan, with certain parties and everybody saying that we have to protect the kids. You're not protecting children by not giving them comprehensive education in the schools. That's up to school boards; that's up to provinces, and it's also up to the federal government and about provincial transfers to get that education in there.

It shouldn't be an “if”. It's a “when”, because we prevent it by having real education that's comprehensive and doesn't shy away from the conversation.

● (1620)

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Fantastic.

My next question is for Angela Marie MacDougall. I'll start by suggesting that I really think it's important that, in collaboration with indigenous groups, we have an action plan that addresses violence against indigenous women and girls, and all BIPOC.

Clearly this was an issue before the pandemic. It's not new. Is there a new way to deliver the programs post pandemic? How has the pandemic itself impacted that?

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: We have seen an erosion of the status of women from an intersectional point of view during COVID-19. We've seen an escalation in violence in a number of ways. That is borne out in terms of the ongoing and persistent numbers of indigenous women and girls who have gone missing, and also those who have been killed during the last two years.

As you mentioned, this is not a new problem. This is not something that hasn't already been identified quite comprehensively through the national action plan on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We as an organization were a party with standing during the inquiry process, and what is wonderful about that plan is that it is one of the most comprehensive documents that we have, I dare say, that looks at the root causes of violence across a number of different aspects, and also at solutions.

We have in front of us a platform, a remedy, a way to take action, and I think there are some important tweaks that can be made. One thing that's profoundly and deeply important right now, and it's something we're working on way out here in the west, in British Columbia, is the “by and for” approach to service delivery. We are resourcing, ensuring that there are the capacity and resources for indigenous-led, indigenous women-led organizations, in order to develop, design and deliver services that make sense for the communities in all of the complexity—because this is at the heart.

If we really understand that the making of Canada as a nation has bathed in a very specific kind of subjugation that is unique and horrifying in terms of the way that it's been targeted against indigenous women and girls, in order for us to remedy that, we must prioritize indigenous women-led solutions all across these lands. That includes of course Inuit and Métis, and first nations on reserve but also in urban settings, because as we know it's a very complicated landscape in which the violence occurs.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Unfortunately I'm going to have to cut some people off today. I will be interrupting, as I said, so please don't take anything personally here. I'm doing my best on that.

I'm now going to move it over to Sonia Sidhu.

Sonia, you have six minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here with us. My first question is for Ms. Khan.

You said that young people are not protected. Can you tell us about some of the best practices for education and the prevention programs addressing intimate partner or domestic violence?

Ms. Farrah Khan: Children are protected in multiple ways. When we don't provide education around domestic violence and intimate partner violence from a young age, children who witness that harm don't know that they're not alone. They may internalize and think it's their fault, that it's something that just happens to their family.

Instead, we need to open that door, because there's a window there too, and make sure they can hear that they're not alone. Best practices, again, are comprehensive conversations about it that don't shy away from talking about body parts, so children who are sexually abused or have experienced family violence in the home know what body parts are being touched so that they can tell someone. I was one of those children, and I wish somebody had given me real education around it.

Another thing that we really need to know for the best practices is for teachers to be educated about it too. Teachers need to know what to do with disclosures, and not only to send children away, because that's not what they need; they need help there in the school. They need to know what that looks like. We've seen protests across this country by students in the past six months who have said, “We're not getting the education we need about healthy relationships. Fix it.” We've seen this from B.C. to P.E.I. We need to listen to those children and youth and know that they need to be protected and cared for. Education that is comprehensive, not abstinence-based, is how to do it.

● (1625)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: To follow up, at what age should young people start learning about safe and healthy relationships? How should a violence prevention initiative be adapted?

You also talked about surveyed data. How can we collect that, and in what way?

Ms. Farrah Khan: I love all these questions.

On the first one, we need to ensure that they're learning from the age of zero. I have a two-year-old, and he knew about body autonomy pretty quickly. I need to affirm his right to choose that his body is his body, and that no one should touch him without consent. That starts at a young age. That doesn't stop. We can't stop children from learning, because they're going to learn in other ways. We need to give them comprehensive, good education on this.

In terms of intimate partner violence, it's making sure too that they're learning about what relationships could look like, not only those that they've seen at home, which sometimes are abusive and harmful. Just as Kripa said, we're talking about intimate partner violence, but it's also about family members, siblings, and how we treat each other with respect and care. I think it can start at a very early age, because violence starts at a very early age. If we don't give them an alternative, then all we're doing is saying, “Do you know what? You're on your own.” I never want to say that to a child, because children should be seen, heard and believed. If they don't have the right information, no one can hear them.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you. My next question is for Kripa Sekhar.

We heard about financial abuse. You said that some women cannot use computers because they face language barriers. I know there are many barriers.

Can you speak to the challenges immigrant women may face when they are trying to leave abusive relationships? What sorts of tactics might their abuser use to prevent them from fleeing or seeking help? What can government do to protect them?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Farrah alluded to some of the issues, but what I want to say, as an immigrant woman and a racialized South Asian woman.... I don't know. In our home, this was something that wasn't even discussed. There was no talk about gender identity. You were raised to listen. You were not allowed to talk about these things. I see that hasn't changed within families who immigrate to this country, regardless of where they come from within the South Asian context. It's still a very silent issue.

I remember, very unfortunately, the time a few years ago when there was an educational piece that was introduced in schools. There were a lot of protests and objections. We had workshops for women who come here, to help them to understand that this was good for their children, and particularly good for young girls, because they had no idea of what we had seen and the level of incest within this community, particularly in the joint family structure.

While education will play a very big part, it is about access to this education, and how best children will be able to get that sense of “Where do I go? How do I understand this? Where can I find these resources?”, when parents are limiting that access. There is still that issue, and we need to find other ways of reaching out to immigrant communities.

The Chair: Thank you very much—

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Farrah—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We have to move on to the next person.

I'm going to now move it over to Andréanne Larouche. You have six minutes.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the three witnesses, Ms. MacDougall, Ms. Khan and Ms. Sekhar, for their remarks today. They have given us insight into domestic violence, both violence against women and violence against gender diverse individuals.

My first question is for Ms. Khan, but I'd be happy to hear from the other two witnesses as well, should they wish to comment.

Ms. Khan, in 2017, the federal government announced Canada's strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence. Among other things, the strategy was designed to fill significant "gaps in supports for diverse populations, including: women and girls; Indigenous women and girls; LGBTQ2…and gender diverse individuals".

In terms of the supports provided by organizations who serve these women, have the gaps been filled or closed at all? Has the situation improved since then? Have the government's actions been consistent with the objectives set out in the 2017 strategy?

Can you tell us where things stand? More studies have just been announced, and they are expected to go on for years.

[*English*]

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Was that question for me? I couldn't get the interpretation.

The Chair: Was there no interpretation at all during that period of time?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: No. I know I had to press this button, but I wasn't able to. I'm sorry. I'm new to this.

The Chair: That's okay. That's what we're talking about. We're all new to this. I totally understand.

Perhaps Farrah can start, and then we'll move on, but I'll leave it up to Andréanne.

Ms. Farrah Khan: My name is Farrah, like "far away" or "far-out".

The question was about how, in 2017, the federal government put forth a gender-based violence action plan, and whether things are getting better for the community at large. I think that's the short version of it.

I can say, as someone who has been on a GBV advisory committee for the federal government, that there are things that are much better under this government in terms of the fact that we are talking about it and it's open to the community. All of a sudden, violence against women organizations were welcomed to Parliament to have in-depth conversations about what we needed to do. All of a sudden, there was funding for organizations to talk about this as a systemic issue and not just as an issue that is something that happens between two people, as Angela has said.

We're also seeing intersectional conversations come forward, and funding that was put forward to the community to put together the national action plan, to the community to say what we needed and to the community to say, "This is what has to happen."

For my program alone, in 2018 the federal government made a commitment to look at gender-based violence at post-secondary institutions. We were part of that work that was being done.

It has been a game-changer to actually be able to talk nationally about this issue, to come together with violence against women organizations, survivors and student leaders and ask, "What are we going to do to address this?"

Has it gotten better? No, because under the pandemic, it has been atrocious, the amount of violence that we are all seeing. In Ontario alone, there was an 84% increase in femicides alone. No, it's not getting better. It's actually devastating, what's going on right now.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: In recent weeks, the committee has heard from representatives of many organizations that serve women who experience gender-based violence. One of the problems they have flagged is the dire need for recurrent and predictable funding from the federal government. The focus tends to be on short-term funding when what they need is long-term funding.

What are your thoughts on that? How would predictable funding help organizations plan for the long term?

[*English*]

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: Who is that question for?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: My question flows from the one I asked Ms. Khan about funding. Ms. MacDougall and Ms. Sekhar can answer if they like.

[*English*]

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: As Farrah mentioned so well, the work of this government has been a really important beginning and an advancement. I'm also on the federal advisory committee on GBV. I think what we need is sustained action. The resourcing of women's and feminist organizations across the country has been important in making community-based responses in a whole range of ways, but it has to be sustained, and we have lost ground under COVID. We've lost considerable ground under COVID.

In order for us to continue the advancements that we think we have made over the last 40 years around addressing inequities, we have to continue to really put the pedal to the metal in terms of funding and resourcing those community-based responses all across the country. The national action plan is a road map for that. It details, at great length, considerable action that could be taken.

On the question about investment, I think that's the next step. It's to see that kind of investment escalate to address not only what we think we achieved as a result of the 2017 initiatives, but also the fact that we've lost considerable ground over the last two years. We have to at least get back to where we were and then continue going, and that's going to take funding and resourcing in a way that the national action plan has detailed.

● (1635)

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: I want to say and add to all of these solutions that I don't think there is a concrete one type of solution to fix all of the issues that have emerged post COVID or during COVID.

We know that the women we serve come from two countries, sometimes even three, and therefore, when there was death and illness of a parent or a partner in another country, it was very difficult for families to meet. In the grieving process, the fear of extreme isolation as a result of that and the abuse women have gone through during this time have been phenomenal. I wanted to give you a few examples, but I don't think I have the time now.

The Chair: What I will do is ask for anything after this. That's absolutely fine.

We're now going to move to Leah.

Leah, you have six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

I wanted to start off with Madam MacDougall.

You spoke about the need for a whole-of-government approach and the importance of having an intersectional approach. This is certainly something that I have been pretty vocal about. We don't have one-size-fits-all solutions, and we have to take histories into consideration as well.

In the introduction to the “Colour of Violence” report that you'll be releasing soon, it was identified that the lack of access to culturally safe spaces creates barriers in accessing support, particularly for Black, indigenous, newcomer, immigrant, refugee and racialized survivors.

I would agree with that, even in the city of Winnipeg. Could you expand on that, please?

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: Thank you.

I so appreciate Treaty No. 1, of course, and the home of the Métis people, and I have had the privilege of being in that territory doing this kind of organizing.

What we haven't seen, and what you, I believe, have named, is that, historically, services have been based around the idea of the universal woman, which has prioritized women of privilege, particularly European women. If we understand that Canada is a settler colonial state, and that through European colonization there has been a stratification, which has positioned European women at the top and indigenous women at the bottom, and then other women layered throughout that stratification, this is really important for us to keep in mind when we're thinking about how we address violence and gender-based violence in communities that have been historically and contemporarily subjugated within that colonial framework, which is alive. This is a living history.

The buy-in for options, which is to resource communities of colour and indigenous communities and Black communities in order to take action, is a really useful approach. We know that indigenous people know how to respond to violence—

● (1640)

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm sorry. I want to ask you another question, and I have a limited amount of time. I want to get it on the record.

You also spoke in the report about individuals working in criminalized or under-the-table economies, such as sex work or garment factories, who also face significant barriers in accessing justice when they experience gender-based violence. I ask this question because in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, they addressed this issue around sex work and how sex workers are often placed in danger because of the criminalized treatment.

Can you expand on that, please?

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: Yes. I think that's an important piece to highlight.

Yes, we have advanced more legal and criminalized options when we're talking about those who exchange sex for money and other things. We know that whenever we seek to create legislation and criminal law around survival and those underground economies, what happens is that communities of colour, particularly indigenous communities and Black communities, experience a different kind of response, in that there is an overpolicing and an underprotecting of those individuals. This is certainly the case for those who exchange sex for money, whether that is in terms of enterprise or whether that's around exploitation.

We think it's very important that the decriminalization approach be considered, certainly for underground economies, and that there are services and options made available to help improve the safety of those who are within perhaps an exploitation framework, but also for those who are in an enterprising kind of capacity in terms of the exchange of sex for money or other things.

Ms. Leah Gazan: This is for Madam Sekhar.

I really appreciated your presentation on racism and language barriers in terms of accessing services.

You also spoke about income. I have proposed a bill for a guaranteed livable basic income, Bill C-223, not requiring Canadian citizenship for refugee claimants and permanent residents, as a way, in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Also, we know there's a direct correlation between violence and poverty and having women actually have a true choice.

Would you agree with me that a guaranteed livable basic income would be a protection factor for women and diverse genders trying to flee violence?

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: Absolutely. The only thing I would request from you is to ensure that it's a realistic livable income, and not something that.... Rents in Toronto for a single bedroom are about $1,500, and I'm being conservative. If you're talking about a livable income for a woman who's trying to support her two children, please ensure that it is realistic. You can't just throw peanuts and expect us to grow bananas.

The Chair: You can't throw peanuts and expect bananas. That's what we should all put into our study. Thank you very much for that last remark. A smile for such a difficult topic to discuss.

We're now going to move on to our second round, but due to time limitations, I'm providing three minutes to both the CPC and the Liberal Party. The NDP and Bloc will be receiving one minute, just because of the time frame.

Dominique, you're on for three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, ladies, for being here today.

My first question is for Ms. Sekhar.

Ms. Sekhar, you talked about the South Asian community and the fact that women in that community who experience violence view it as their fate.

Did I get that right?

● (1645)

[*English*]

Ms. Kripa Sekhar: It's the way in which South Asian women have been socialized. This is part of their journey. Even the man is selected for them, or whoever it is, and they have to complete that particular role as a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law and a sister-in-law. A South Asian woman is essentially married to the family, and I'm using the word marriage only because it's such a tradition-bound community.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Culturally, that transmission never stops if that is the model girls in the community have.

Ms. Khan, you said that transgender people were seven times more likely to experience violence than members of other groups.

Did I get that right?

[*English*]

Ms. Farrah Khan: They are 1.7 times more likely, and that's from the Trans Pulse survey that came out just recently. I would really advise you to read that. It's an excellent survey that looked at the experiences of transpeople in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Are you referring to intimate partner violence?

[*English*]

Ms. Farrah Khan: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: What does that violence look like? Is it the same as in cases of intimate partner violence? Does violence against transgender people follow the same model; is it experienced the same way?

[*English*]

Ms. Farrah Khan: In some ways it is the same, because transwomen are women and transmen are men, so there are things that happen within those relationships, but there are some things that are different. When we live in a culture that is still extremely transphobic, where we have laws and policies that tell them they are not allowed to use services, access supports or be seen as people—

The Chair: I have to move you on. I'm sorry. I'm trying to get everything rolling, and our time is just crushing right now.

Ms. Farrah Khan: I understand that, but I'm going to finish my sentence.

The Chair: That's okay. Thank you for—

Ms. Farrah Khan: When transpeople experience violence—

The Chair: Wow.

Ms. Farrah Khan: —they experience high rates of violence, and when they experience that, it's really important to understand that transphobia makes it difficult for them to be safe. If we don't address transphobia and hatred for transpeople, we won't end that.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you very much.

I'm going to remind everybody that we are tight on time. Please, let's be respectful of everybody's time. I really appreciate that.

I'm going to now move it over to Anita.

You have three minutes only.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. My first question is for Ms. Khan.

You mentioned some really alarming statistics about young women—women aged 15 to 24—experiencing intimate partner violence or at least being in proximity to it. You very briefly touched on the digital sphere and the role that social media and online violence might have in propagating that.

I wonder if you could elaborate on that.

Ms. Farrah Khan: The digital fear is huge. What we see right now is the trading of nudes. We see people putting out intimate images without consent. We see students harassed in lots of ways. We see young people solicited online and catfished. We see the ways in which families also survey and monitor and stalk their siblings or their family members using phones.

Online harassment is huge. We have to recognize that it also happens within domestic violence relationships and within the family. That is a huge issue. It's devastating, what we're seeing online.

● (1650)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: My other question is for Ms. MacDougall, but if we have time, I'd like the others to answer that.

You spoke about systemic inequities. We often think about GBV and intimate partner violence in terms of BIPOC newcomer and racialized communities experiencing it in larger numbers. You said something about there being racism through service provision and policies, so when they actually go out to seek that help, there's also racism in the experiences of BIPOC women.

I wonder if you could elaborate on that.

The Chair: You have 90 seconds in total.

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: Overarchingly, it is the result of endemic and systemic racism, attitudinal and behavioural, that is then acted out in what a survivor experiences when they attempt to access services. It's also the way in which services are created and delivered.

This is not to disparage our incredible workers all across these lands, who are under-resourced and undersupported. It is a recognition that we are talking about historic inequities that exist.

We want to redress that. We want to disrupt that and to shift it by centring an anti-racist approach, which is to really understand these behavioural and attitudinal challenges.

It's also with respect to how we think about violence in general. That means we have to think about policing and about child protection and child welfare and the health system, which are all, of course, infused with the same inequities and racist attitudes and practices.

It's an ongoing piece of work, which I think is laid out in some ways through the national action plan on missing and murdered indigenous women in terms of those pieces. It's also described and laid out very well through the road map to a national action plan, which I understand the committee has.

The Chair: Awesome. Thank you so much.

We're now going to be moving it over for the last minute to Andréanne.

You have one minute, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all three witnesses in the first panel.

I'm not sure whether it was Ms. MacDougall or Ms. Khan who brought up coercive control, so my question is for both of you.

Why is it important to broaden the definition of violence to include coercive control?

[*English*]

Ms. Farrah Khan: It's so important, because right now there's such a limited view of what happens in domestic violence—things like controlling your whereabouts, where you go, and how violence is actually manifested. Oftentimes it isn't physical or sexual.

Allowing us to have a wider view of that to include coercive control, and to make sure that survivors know that what's happening in their households, in their families and their intimate relationships, is wrong, enables us to do better education, and it gives people more methods of providing support. We need that right now.

Ms. Angela Marie MacDougall: If I could jump in quickly, coercive control is kind of a rebranding of power and control, which is an idea that we've been working with since the 1990s. That's another important consideration. Often we think about physical and sexual violence, but we're not thinking about all the other tactics of power and control that exist in an abusive relationship.

The legislation piece is an important consideration. We have a situation right now that is not—

The Chair: Thank you very much. Excuse me. I have to cut people off, because we have had people in the waiting room, trying to get in, since 4:30 p.m.

I'll pass it over to Leah for a final minute.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

Madam Khan, women with disabilities are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted. There's almost zero attention given to this reality. Can you speak to that, please?

Ms. Farrah Khan: I would add to that children of all genders who have disabilities. I have a son with a disability, and it's something I worry about every day.

It's something we need to address in terms of how our service provision is done, how we access services and what services we're looking at. We also need to be expanding who we see as the people who commit gender-based violence, looking at people who are caregivers, people brought in as nurses, and people who support children with disabilities, people with disabilities and specifically women with disabilities.

Again, if we're not centring the most marginalized in the approaches we take with the NAP, then we're leaving people behind. We need to centre people with disabilities, specifically women, trans and gender non-binary folks, so that they can get the support they need. We cannot leave them behind. We have to centre them.

● (1655)

The Chair: Awesome. Thank you so much.

On behalf of the status of women committee, I would really like to thank Battered Women's Support Services, Possibility Seeds and the South Asian Women's Centre. If you have documents, briefs and additional information that you would like to send, please feel free to send them to the clerk.

Thank you very much. Have a wonderful day.

We'll now take a break in order to switch panels.

● (1655)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you to everybody who's joining us. We are in our final panel of the day.

On our second panel we have, from L'Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de 2e étape pour femmes et enfants victimes de violence conjugale, Sabrina Lemeltier and Maud Pontel; from the Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society, Josie Nepinak; and from the BC Lions football club and the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia, joining together, we have Jamie Taras and Ninu Kang.

I'd like to thank you all for coming here. We'll start by giving each organization five minutes for an opening statement. At the four-minute mark, I will start letting you know that you have one minute left.

I will now pass the floor over to the alliance for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Maud Pontel (General Coordinator, Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de 2e étape pour femmes et enfants victimes de violence conjugale): Good afternoon.

I'd like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for the opportunity to contribute to your study on intimate partner and domestic violence.

The Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de 2e étape pour femmes et enfants victimes de violence conjugale is a provincial organization with 34 shelter members.

Today, I will be presenting solutions based on protection and support mechanisms for victims of intimate partner violence in relation to post-separation domestic violence, coercive control and consistent government support.

Before delving into the technical side of our recommendations, I want to take a few moments to share a real-life case with you. Any time legislative solutions are being considered, it is important to keep in mind that domestic violence affects real people in a very real way.

Exactly five years ago today, March 22, 2017, a young woman named Daphné Huard-Boudreault was killed by her ex-partner. After leaving a toxic relationship with that individual, Daphné was repeatedly harassed by him. She went to police, but unfortunately did not meet with a proper response, receiving inadequate support and advice. Alone, she went to retrieve her personal belongings at her ex-partner's home, where police were supposed to meet her. Before they arrived, she was brutally murdered by her ex-partner.

This tragic case highlights what can happen when victims do not receive adequate support. Although a protocol did exist, it was not implemented owing to a lack of training. A life was lost and many others are forever destroyed.

Today, on top of grieving for his daughter and dealing with a wound that will never heal, Daphné's father, Éric Boudreault, is fighting for justice and more support for victims. With great generosity, he has allowed us to read you an excerpt of his message to his daughter Daphné.

> Today, my sadness must contend with frustration and anger. Five years later, I am more than convinced that you were abandoned, but unfortunately I cannot abandon this fight. I will rest later because the systemic normalization of domestic violence is more real than ever and must stop. The fight is just beginning, and I am counting on you to hold me up, as you always have.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. I really appreciate your doing that.

We're now moving over to the BC Lions football club and the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia.

Jamie and Ninu, I'm going to let you decide who goes first. I pass the floor to you.

Ms. Ninu Kang (Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia): Thank you, Madam Chair and the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, for inviting Jamie Taras of the BC Lions football club and me to present on the importance of engaging boys and men in our national gender-based violence strategy.

I'm Ninu Kang, executive director of the Ending Violence Association of BC, and I am calling from the unceded, ancestral and traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

EVA BC is a provincial association working together with nearly 300 member programs to provide frontline support services across B.C. to end gender-based violence, harassment and hate. Additionally, we provide cross-sectoral supports by bringing community together, and we deliver prevention programs by engaging boys and men through our internationally recognized and award-winning program, Be More Than a Bystander, to break the silence on gender-based violence. It's a partnership with the BC Lions football club, which Jamie will also speak to in a minute.

Why is engaging boys and men through the Be More Than a Bystander program so important? Well, we know from previous panellists that intimate partner violence represents 26% of all violent crimes that come to the attention of law enforcement. We also know that sexual assault is the most under-reported of all crimes—less than 5%. One in three women is sexually assaulted in her lifetime, and 66% of female sexual assault victims and survivors are under the age of 24.

You can see that raising awareness on gender-based violence, and providing simple tools to boys and men to intervene and respond to various forms of gender-based violence, is critical. It's empowering boys and men to be part of the solution instead of being part of the problem.

Gender-based violence has been seen as a women's issue, and we raise our hands to all the women who came before us, who fought the fight, and who influenced the policies, systems and structures we have today. However, there is a critical resource we left untapped: men who are ready and willing to stand up next to women to end gender-based violence.

In 2011, EVA BC approached the BC Lions to partner with us and join us in the work to end gender-based violence. We worked with a male educator named Jackson Katz, who argues that while women have been at the forefront of this work, it is not a women's issue. In fact, he argues that this is a men's issue.

The approach really resonated with us and, together with the BC Lions football club, we developed the Be More Than a Bystander program. The program utilizes professional sports icons—BC Lions football players—who go into high schools with anti-violence workers to speak to thousands of boys and girls to raise awareness to end gender-based violence.

The program also implemented a province-wide promotion and awareness strategy, utilizing TV, radio, social media, game-day ads and other media to promote the Be More Than a Bystander message to Lions fans and followers throughout our province.

I'm going to send it over to Jamie to talk more about the BC Lions experience.

● (1705)

Mr. Jamie Taras (Director of Community Partnerships, BC Lions): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Ninu. It's an honour and a privilege to be here today.

Before I start, I want to recognize the true heroes on this call: all of the women who have dedicated their lives to making our society safer when it comes to gender-based violence. Thank you sincerely for your efforts.

For those of you who don't know, the BC Lions football club is a professional football team that competes in the CFL. The only reason we entered this arena is that we were asked to help. Gender-based violence is a complex, challenging and difficult reality, and, well, we play football.

I remember that when we first discussed getting involved with our leadership team, I expressed concerns about how our own organization's reputation might be at risk of skeletons coming out of the closet, or of current players or coaches having an incident and the press jumping all over us, dragging the BC Lions' good name through the mud. However, it was our head coach at the time, the legendary Wally Buono, who stood up and stated emphatically, “We should do this because it's the right thing to do. Our community has a problem. They've asked for our help, so let's do our best to give it.”

It turns out that Wally had experienced domestic violence in his own home growing up, and had to intervene on behalf of his mother. He went on to say that if we have challenges within our organization, we will deal with them. We won't hide from them. We will do what's right. So we took a giant leap forward alongside our partner, EVA BC, and launched the Be More Than a Bystander program.

Over the past 11 years, we have visited many locations throughout our beautiful province, teaching high school students about gender-based violence, sharing with them the tools to safely intervene, and ultimately encouraging them to be more than a bystander and break the silence on gender-based violence. It's safe to say the program has been a success. The silence has been broken, and the dialogue about this topic has been embraced by the students we have visited.

From an organizational perspective, we are among the first professional sports leagues to adopt a gender-based violence policy.

Is my time up here?

The Chair: It sure is, but thank you so much. I should have given you a time out maybe five yards back, something important here. Anyway, thank you so much.

We're now going to come back to speak to the Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society, with Josie.

Josie, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Josie Nepinak (Executive Director, Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society): Good afternoon. I'm Josie Nepinak, executive director for the Awo Taan Healing Lodge. I come to you this afternoon from beautiful Moh'kinsstis in the Treaty 7 territory, also known as Calgary, Alberta.

I'd like to tell you a bit about the Awo Taan Healing Lodge. For 32 years we have provided services to indigenous women and their families, as well as to immigrant women and settled Canadians. We've been doing this business for more than 30 years.

However, our framework is quite unique and different, I would say, from mainstream emergency women's shelters. We centre the elders' knowledge and wisdom within our practice framework, and that is around the traditional teachings of the diverse indigenous people who live in Calgary as well as access to the medicines that are part of who we are as spirit. Also, we take multi-generational families into the emergency shelter; we have grandmothers with their grandchildren, grandmothers, daughters, grandchildren and aunties. We bring in the whole family, whereas other mainstream shelters don't have that practice. However, it is indicative of the family unit within our indigenous communities.

A program that we're currently working on is called reconciliation and healing from trauma and violence, an indigenous healing and wellness framework as a promising practice for indigenous survivors and their families, and this program is now in its third year based on an evaluation of the women who come into the emergency shelter. Through surveys, storytelling and various activities, we talk to them about what they need in terms of support and services, and one of the biggest things they say is that sense of community and the building of community. When they come into a service area, they would like to see people who look like them—they want to see the dark hair, the brown eyes—they want people with a common experience, because they're often feeling that they have been judged over and over multiple times because of who they are; they're feeling not welcome or that perhaps this is not the right place for them; they're wondering if they'll get what they need here.

What we do with that is we employ an indigenous framework and storytelling lens to the research that we do. We hope that this work that we're currently conducting will become a blueprint model for other emergency shelters, not necessarily specific to but for those who serve indigenous women across the country.

The other project that we are just launching at this moment is what we call reclaiming power and place, which is co-developing distinctions-based principles of engagement with families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We're doing this in Calgary with the Calgary Police Service, with whom we've had conversations about coming together and talking about when there is a missing or murdered loved one, how do we work with families in such a way that families are feeling respected, are feeling listened to, and so that there is integrity in the investigation?

I will tell you, there are at least seven families in Calgary that are still waiting for answers from the police regarding the violent death of their loved one. In this project over the next year we will have engagement sessions with Calgary Police Service, indigenous community elders, survivors and allies to talk about what this communication protocol might look like. We understand that there are processes that the police service have in terms of their investigation, but how do we as families of MMIW wish to proceed with those conversations, and what is it that we need? Quite often, for families, as you're well aware from the national inquiry as well as the provincial recommendations we just did, the communication and the relationship with the police is the most stressful and seen as the most racist experience that indigenous families have with the process.

● (1710)

We hope to develop a culturally safe engagement strategy and protocols with families of MMIW. We hope to co-develop an engagement and evaluation tool with them. At the end of the day, we want protocols to have that respectful interaction.

The other thing I want to say, because I know that my time is quickly running out, is that there are often nice words attached to the experiences of indigenous women, such as gender-based violence. In my language, which is Anishinabe, I don't know that there is such a word as “gender”. I think about family violence and where family violence comes from. In an indigenous community—you've heard this—it comes from genocide, paternalistic policies that exist around indigenous women and families, the destruction of families, and racism. These together—

I'm so sorry.

● (1715)

The Chair: It's okay. We have gone way over time on yours, to be honest.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: I'm so sorry.

The Chair: Oh no, you have such important information. I just want to allow everybody...but we are getting into such critical time right now, and I'm sorry. We will be going only to 5:45, and then we have committee business after that.

It's going to be six-minute rounds to start, and then we'll decide at the 24-minute mark how we'll proceed from there. I'm going to pass the floor over to Dominique.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us this afternoon.

My first questions are for the representatives of the Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de 2e étape pour femmes et enfants victimes de violence conjugale.

Ms. Pontel, thank you for your opening statement. My sense is that we can learn a bit more about the solutions available.

You talked about what happened to Ms. Huard-Boudreault, which is not only appalling, but also disturbing, to be quite honest. It's clear that the system failed and that mistakes were made.

What is your take-away from the case? Should we put more focus on training police officers?

What more should we be doing to help women who are put in terrible situations—as Ms. Huard-Boudreault was—having to retrieve their belongings alone? Where did the failure occur? What can we do better in these types of situations?

Ms. Maud Pontel: Thank you for the question.

I wanted to add that you missed a small part of my presentation. It was about improving and fixing the safety net, putting in place safeguards for victims and their children.

To answer your question, I would say a number of solutions are available. I will let my colleague Sabrina Lemeltier tell you about some of them.

Ms. Sabrina Lemeltier (President, Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de 2e étape pour femmes et enfants victimes de violence conjugale): In Quebec, just before the pandemic, a panel of experts on support for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence released a report about rebuilding trust. In it, the panel made 190 bold recommendations to finally build the safety net we talked about. I'll run through a few of them.

The panel recommends creating a special court based on the principle of vertical prosecution to support victims in domestic and sexual violence cases. It recommends the wearing of electronic bracelets to—finally—prevent ex-spouses who are released from prison and continue to harass their victims from committing murders, homicides and infanticides. Bear in mind that children are also killed because of domestic violence. The panel talks about a continuum of support services. It is essential to understand that victims need support every step of the way.

Coming back to your first question, about Ms. Huard-Boudreault—whom I'll call Daphné—I would say this. Daphné was a young woman of 18, and in her case, police officer training was terribly inadequate. Officers are supposed to follow a protocol to escort victims of domestic violence when going to the home to retrieve their belongings. The police let her go to the home on her own, giving her ex-partner enough time to kill her before they arrived a few minutes later.

The issues are incredibly complex, so we would need to spend a few hours with you to go through them all.

Another important element is domestic violence as grounds for deciding whether the security or development of the child is in danger. I'll let Ms. Pontel tell you about that.

● (1720)

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Please keep it brief, Ms. Pontel.

Ms. Maud Pontel: I will.

Very recently, the provincial government was considering reforms to the Youth Protection Act, and we urged the government to recognize domestic violence in its own right in the act.

Recognizing domestic violence in its own right under the act would have a huge impact in terms of understanding the problem around domestic violence, including after a separation. Many of the people who work in youth protection see domestic violence situations as major separation disputes or parental alienation, when the problem is really domestic violence and post-separation domestic violence.

We mentioned the training of front-line workers and police officers, but those who work in the youth protection system need training as well. That training will contribute to a better overall understanding, so the various actors can work together. In fact, Quebec has created rapid intervention units, bringing together several partners to respond to highly dangerous situations within 24 to 48 hours.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you.

I don't have a lot of time, so I'm going to move on to another topic, football.

Mr. Taras, has your experience been replicated elsewhere that you know of?

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Taras: Are you asking whether we have taken it outside of the province of British Columbia?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I'd actually like to know whether other sports teams, other football teams, have followed your lead.

Can your initiative be adopted in other settings?

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Taras: Yes, we have had the opportunity to train other teams in the CFL to adopt a similar program. We've also worked with other sports organizations, and anyone who really wanted to get involved, including amateur sports. We have also tried to pass on the knowledge, the model, and the methodology to other sports teams.

The Chair: Awesome, thank you very much. Jamie, you're the one I seem to be cutting off a lot today, so sorry about that.

I'm now going to move to Jenna, for six minutes.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses who have joined us today. There is some really inspiring work that you're undertaking.

I want to go back to Mr. Taras. What strikes me is the fact that this program, if I heard correctly, has been operating since 2011, so I'd like to give you a brief moment to speak to the success or experience, over those 11 years, that demonstrates the success of the program.

Mr. Jamie Taras: Success has been the appetite of the students. There's a real willingness on the part of the students in the schools to hear this information about domestic violence, partner violence, gender-based violence, and then to get involved as part of the solution.

I believe there is a lot of hope there. That's why we wanted to get involved with that age group, because it's difficult sometimes to change the mental models and biases of older people. For the young, we thought it would be a great place to start, and that was where we felt our voice could best be heard.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: Terrific. Thank you so much.

Ms. Kang, we heard a lot today about the impact of speaking and engaging with children at a young age about gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. In your experience, how has it been received when you're starting those discussions with the young and educating youth, as it were, at a young age?

Ms. Ninu Kang: You asked Jamie earlier about the success of this program. It's the model that we have developed. This model is a true partnership between the BC Lions and a women-serving, women-centred organization. It's about working with men who are really committed to standing next to us, as women.

When I think about that program and the new players.... We train them. Jamie and I just finished a training with a new cohort of BC Lions. They're now trained to go into the schools. We feel that the young people are looking up to these sports icons. We have an anti-violence worker there with them. If any disclosures come up, we have supports in place. In the back end, we also really work closely with the school and the school counsellors to ensure that when we're in and out of there in that way, there's capacity within those schools to continue to support the young people.

When I think about engaging with young people, the other very significant part of this program is that we do not demonize boys and men. Often, when we look at the gender-based violence issue, it has kind of put women and men or girls and boys on the opposite sides of the spectrum. Because of the fact that we've needed to address this very challenging issue, we've had to really centre on survivors. This is an opportunity to prevent us from having to intervene when violence actually happens.

These are young boys who see men standing and talking about gender-based violence. They're looking up to them. They're creating vocabulary. They're creating simple tools for how to intervene without it being something super-comprehensive.

We want this to become part of their wiring so they know that when they see something, they're going to step in and feel empowered to do something. We leave them with very simple tools in this program.

● (1725)

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: That's amazing. Thank you so much.

The next question is for Ms. Nepinak.

In your testimony you spoke about the importance of building community. It really gave me a sense of how important the work you're doing is for ensuring culturally appropriate supports. I'm wondering if you can speak to us a bit about the factors that are influencing the healing journey of the women you're serving.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Thank you.

We have to remember that the demographics of indigenous women coming into large urban centres have changed, particularly over the past decade. Indigenous women are coming from across the country to live in urban centres like Calgary. They often find themselves quite isolated. There is a need to connect with a cultural community. There's a need to connect to people who look like them, speak the same language and share in the ceremony, the food and the family kinships they have within their communities. There is a need for that connection and to build community and cultural events around those factors while feeling like you belong. It's belonging without judgment and without racism with individuals who have a shared history and who accept you as you are with that shared history.

This is what indigenous women are telling us. Whether it's a group of women coming together to sing drum songs or do some beadwork, or whether it's a collective kitchen and we decide we're going to make bannock tacos for supper, that is building that community. It's about that connection.

The humour is something else. Laughing with your friends is important.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass the floor over to Andréanne for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses, Ms. Lemeltier, Ms. Pontel, Ms. Nepinak, Ms. Kang and Mr. Taras, for taking the time to speak with us today. We are gaining a lot of insight into an important problem.

My first question is for Ms. Lemeltier, of the Alliance des maisons d'hébergement de 2e étape pour femmes et enfants victimes de violence conjugale.

Ms. Lemeltier, you talked about an important tool in addressing domestic violence, the electronic bracelet. You mention it in your brief to the Quebec National Assembly's Committee on Institutions, as part of its examination of Bill 24.

More or less, this is what you say in your brief:

> [A] number of recent government initiatives have clearly established the need to apply a specific lens when family dynamics involve domestic violence, in which one spouse (usually the father) exerts coercive control over the other spouse (the mother) and by extension the children. Coercive control involves a dynamic of control and domination within a relationship between intimate partners where the abuser increases the number of attacks to gain total control over the victim, completely inhibiting the victim's freedom to be and act as they wish.

Can you elaborate on that statement, Ms. Lemeltier?

● (1730)

Ms. Sabrina Lemeltier: Thank you for the question.

Coercive control is a very important topic that we wanted to address.

I'll give you a very real example.

I am also the director of a shelter that offers first and second stage emergency housing. This weekend, a woman housed in our first stage shelter went to a garage to have her tires changed, and the mechanic discovered a GPS tracker. Her ex-spouse, from whom she had recently separated, put the tracker on to follow her every move. Imagine the panic this discovery caused. This woman, who was in a shelter with a confidential address, had her safety jeopardized.

With regard to coercive control, it is important to realize that domestic violence can be physical or sexual, but it can also take other forms, which are much more difficult to detect. It is necessary to offer training to all the stakeholders in the field so they can understand that, even if the woman does not have a black eye, she is still a victim of domestic violence.

Women often go to second-stage housing a few months after a separation, and one might think that domestic violence stops at that point. Instead, it takes another form, called post-separation spousal abuse. This violence can manifest in many ways, including harassment on social networks, maintaining financial control, retaining a woman's immigration documents or denying supervised right of access, which impacts children's safety. Control continues and increases over time. The time after a separation is the most dangerous for women and, I repeat, for children.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Yes, that is indeed the case.

We know that with regard to sexual violence, power and control, it is important to legislate regarding coercive control. It is crucial to do this to get to the root of the problem and try to address it upstream.

According to representatives of the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale who appeared before the committee, the criminalization of coercive control may not be the solution that will solve everything. It must include training for those involved in the justice system and public prevention.

What do you think? Is it still a potential solution that should be considered, if only as a complement to other preventive solutions, such as the tracking bracelet, to increase women's sense of safety?

Ms. Maud Pontel: Indeed, recognition of the concept of coercive control comes with continuing education for police forces, the judiciary, everyone who works in the justice system. We strongly emphasize that the concept of coercive control is inseparable from the definition of domestic violence. This is about power, domination and coercion.

We strongly emphasize that the Canadian Criminal Code should recognize coercive control because it will lead to awareness and training, especially for those working directly with victims.

We also know that second-stage housing workers supporting women must be able to identify coercive control and how it manifests after a separation. If the rest of the justice system can only see part of the concept, then actions to support victims will only have a partial impact.

The concept of coercive control is highly significant to us. Recognizing it would add a tool to complete the suite of measures currently being put in place to establish a safety net around women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Of course, tracking bracelets are also part of this suite of measures that we want to see put in place to make victims safer.

● (1735)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, ladies.

What I understand is that the Criminal Code should reflect what is being done in Quebec.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you so much.

I'm now going to pass it over, for six more minutes, to Leah Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

The first questions I want to ask are for Madam Nepinak. It's a pleasure to have you here. I know your son, Chief Nepinak, very well, and he always speaks so highly of you and of the work you've done for so long on ending violence against indigenous women and girls.

I want to focus specifically on police. You spoke about a distrust between police and indigenous people, and I think it's for good reason. I'm going to give a couple of examples and I want you to answer how you think we need to mend the relationship. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls certainly provided calls for justice.

Eishia Hudson in Winnipeg was shot dead by police. There's currently an inquest. On Wet'suwet'en territory, we saw two RCMP officers with a guard dog, a chainsaw and an axe take down a door on the other side of which were two unarmed indigenous women.

One of the most horrific and disgusting acts of police abuse of power was actually in northern Manitoba, with former RCMP officer Theriault. An article says, “Theriault and another constable had arrested the woman at a party and placed her in a cell until she sobered up. Six hours after she was brought in, Theriault returned to the detachment out of uniform and asked for her to be released into his care”, which he was allowed to do by the supervising officer, who reportedly said, “You arrested her, you can do whatever the f—- you want to do.”

I don't know if I have the quote right, but it's hard to forget. It was something to that effect.

So there are real reasons why there's mistrust. It's not hysteria. It goes beyond stereotypes. This relationship is severely, severely tainted.

What kinds of steps need to be taken to improve the relationship, to ensure that should indigenous women and girls and gender-diverse people have involvement with police, not only will the relationship be amended but their safety will be ensured?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: The relationship we currently have with the police is severely fractured, and the atrocities that are happening to indigenous women within police services across the country are, in my opinion, an epidemic requiring immediate attention from the policy-makers and the legislators so that those actions are stopped immediately.

I think police services in this country have made indigenous women disposable. The very fact that the police have it in their power to take the lives of indigenous women and young indigenous girls as well.... We have heard of police officers raping and impregnating young indigenous women, and we've heard stories at the national inquiry of indigenous women being stopped on the highway and raped by police officers.

In my opinion this system needs to be dismantled and rebuilt from the bottom up, so that safe spaces for indigenous women are built in.

There is a model in, I believe, South America in which there are police stations run by police women only. These police stations don't look like police offices. They look like daycare centres. You walk in and the office is occupied by police officers, women who are dressed in street clothing, but there is a play area as well for children to be looked after and nurtured while the woman is in a safe place to tell her story about an incident of violence that happened to her.

We need to change the way we're thinking about policing and indigenous people in this country. The genocide must stop. You cannot imagine the colonial violence perpetuated by police in this country unless you have experienced it. Most folks who have privilege cannot fathom that this actually happens in the communities. As a child, I had to run away from police officers because they were going to take us, and they became known as “those who take us away”. That is certainly still the case today, almost 60 years from the day I first went into the residential school, so we must do this in a better way. As I say, let's dismantle and let's build from the ground up—

● (1740)

Ms. Leah Gazan: In Winnipeg, as you know—I'm going to brag—we have Bear Clan Patrol and Mama Bear Clan patrol, which are really community volunteer street patrols that monitor the community, get to know the community and make sure that we look after each other as a community. Do you think those kinds of community-led and community-driven safety patrols are a good alternative to ensure that indigenous women and girls are safe?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Yes. Absolutely. In Calgary we have the Bear Clan. We have another group who've called themselves Crazy Indians. When there is an emergency in the community, as we had a few weeks ago with the death of a young boy, these folks come out to be the firekeepers. As we know, we have to have the four-day fire when there is a death. They volunteer their time. They volunteer resources.

Most of these groups are doing this work without any resources at all. They're volunteering their time. Many of them work during the day and then give their time at night to ensure that people are safe. We need to look at community-based solutions and we need to go back to the indigenous, as the experts of our communities, to develop those solutions.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you very much.

We're now into our second round. We're getting very, very tight on time. It will be three minutes, three minutes, one minute and one minute.

Shelby and Eric, you have three minutes.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have one question, and then I'll leave the rest of the time for my colleague Shelby.

To our friends from B.C., whoever would like to answer the question, I'm curious about Be More Than a Bystander. I'm wondering if there are any measurable benchmarks or ways of monitoring the success and the areas of improvement in the program. Perhaps you could talk about that. If you do have those measures that you're tracking, I would ask you to submit them to the committee after the meeting.

Ms. Ninu Kang: We do ongoing evaluations and feedback for the programs we deliver. In our partnership with the BC Lions, again, ongoing communication happens between us. We're using a bit of a continuous improvement methodology. We don't have a formal evaluation of this program that we could provide to the committee, but we can certainly provide data with regard to what we've compiled over the last 11 years. Jamie and I are happy to put our heads together and get something over to you on that.

One thing I want to say is that the methodology we use is actually very simple. It's a very simple message that we deliver to young boys and girls in school. One of the key components is to unveil masculinity. It's to talk to young boys about the messages they're receiving about being a boy and what it means, right from birth onwards to when they're in school with the positioning and the posturing that boys do as a result of all the messages we hear, including now all the digital media messages, which we've talked a lot about.

The second component of this program is to actually give them some practical tools. We've used videos to demonstrate and then to pose questions to young people: What would you do in this scenario? In this particular incident, how would you be more than a bystander? What are some of the verbal and non-verbal things you can say or do to intervene and interrupt the violence?

Again, I just want to stress that it's such a simple yet powerful methodology and approach that we're using, which is why it's won awards internationally and been recognized locally. As Jamie said, we've taken it nationally, to the CFL, and we're working with other corporates and unions on taking it there. That's the power of this program.

● (1745)

The Chair: That's awesome. Thank you so much.

Emmanuella, we will go to you for the next three minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses, but specifically Ms. Kang and Mr. Taras. My questions are going to be for you.

In every single meeting of this committee on this particular study, we hear a lot of testimony about how crappy this world is. I'm a huge fan of the work you are doing. I'm a former high school teacher. I've worked most of my working life with children. The reason is that I see them as beacons of hope who can still be shaped and influenced in the right way.

I say a big “thank you” and “congratulations” for what you guys have been doing. A big part of the reason it's been working is that you're sending in successful football players to talk to these kids. They see them as role models. We know that role models play a huge role in how people see themselves as they grow up.

You mentioned that men and boys are supposed to be part of the solution. I'm really happy that we've figured out a way to get boys involved.

Do you have any suggestions for how we can get men who are not necessarily at that early stage of learning to buy in to the idea that they need to be not just bystanders, but also part of the solution?

Ms. Ninu Kang: Jamie, maybe you can speak to the [*Inaudible—Editor*] program.

Mr. Jamie Taras: It's one of the things we do during every presentation, including school presentations and presentations within the communities. We challenge men and boys to get involved as advocates and allies with our sisters. It's in the sense that this isn't a women's issue; it's a men's issue, because it's men who are, unfortunately, committing most of these violent crimes. That is a core part of all of the messages that we give the kids and adults that we speak to.

That's why I'm involved. When I heard that one in three women are going to be sexually assaulted in this beautiful and wonderful country, I was disgusted. That's what drove me to get involved, to lend my voice alongside my sisters and to speak up against gender-based violence.

That's the power in men talking to other men. That's what we try to do.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much for those answers.

It's also important to focus on the negative effects of toxic masculinity on men, the fact that they can't necessarily express their emotions in the same way without being judged, and the fact that the suicide rate is higher among men. There is definitely a big benefit to our talking about gender in this open way and talking about these different stereotypes.

Thank you again for the work that you're doing, and thanks again to all the witnesses.

I won't take up too much time.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over to Andréanne for one minute.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

First of all, Ms. Lemeltier and Ms. Pontel, thank you for your testimony. I will give you the last word, as there is less than a minute left.

According to Statistics Canada, nearly half of women who experienced intimate partner violence, 43%, reported feeling controlled or trapped by their intimate partner.

In conclusion, isn't this a sign that something needs to be done about this issue, especially since these types of coercive control are often precursors to physical violence?

Ms. Sabrina Lemeltier: Yes, there is no doubt that the figures you have just mentioned are very important and that they should be reflected in the services offered to women. Currently, in Quebec, there are not enough resources to meet the level of demand. For example, a city like Montreal refuses 75% of the requests from women who want to access a second-stage shelter.

There is a narrative that encourages women to seek help and for those around them to speak out, but at the same time, when they ask for services, there is no room.

When we start thinking about policy, it's important to think about the continuum, from disclosure to getting services to returning to the community. I would say it even extends to social housing. Currently, there is not enough second-stage housing, which means we can't house everyone.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you very much—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sabrina Lemeltier: Consequently, they can't be decently housed at a cost within their means.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry about that. Thank you very much.

We have only a minute left, and we're going to pass it over to Leah Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

Madam Nepinak, you spoke about your programs that had taken intergenerational families. Can you explain why that's particularly important for indigenous people?

● (1750)

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Quite often, as we know in indigenous communities there are multiple families living together, and that is often the preferred way. It is how I grew up as well, with my great-grandmother, my grandmother and then me, because my mother had to go out to work cleaning houses, etc. It's having that sense of belonging and that sense of community and that nurturing. It's carrying on some of the traditional teachings, such as the language, because that's a huge piece.

There are also the other pieces around some of the ceremonial work that needed to be done around the household and community, and that was by looking after family. We truly had that extended family, because we had other family members in the community who we quite often brought into the house to be part of the household. We had crisis intervention as well in the homes, when someone was in trouble.

We had all those traditional methods, and I believe we need to revisit some of that wisdom and go back to some of that practice. It is extremely important for grandchildren to have their grandmothers present with them, as well as their aunties.

Thank you.

The Chair: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

I think we saw there, with Ms. Pontel's little daughter coming over, why we need to do such important work like this.

On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank Sabrina, Maud, Josie, Jamie and Ninu for being part of this great discussion today. If you could log off, that would be fantastic. I really appreciate your coming and providing your testimony.

In seconds, once everybody is logged off, we will be going through some committee business.

I'm seeing all the great faces on here, so fantastic.

I have advised some of the vice-chairs on this. We want to talk about destroying confidential documents. This is something I brought up to other people, and I'm looking to see if somebody is willing to move a motion on destroying these documents.

Leah, would you like....? Go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm sorry. It's been a long day.

The Chair: That's not a problem.

Leah, can you be on record asking for these documents to be destroyed, please?

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, 100%.

The Chair: I think you'll have to say it.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I move that the records be destroyed.

The Chair: Confidentially.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Can I have a nap now? I'm just kidding.

The Chair: You're good.

I'm sorry. I did read all of this, so we are receiving so many, and I'm sure all of you have had the opportunity to go through them, but considering the sensitive nature of the study on intimate partner violence in Canada, I was seeking the agreement we've just passed, so I really appreciate that.

We have one other situation here. A person who is going to be one of the witnesses has requested from the clerk that additional measures be taken for their security. As a survivor has requested that additional measures be taken to ensure confidentiality, the clerk will retain a paper copy of her brief in the office. Should members want to consult her brief, they may get in touch with the clerk.

Do I have the committee's agreement on this?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's fantastic. There will be documentation available through the clerk, and Alexie will let you know what we need to do there.

As we continue on Friday, we're going to have another busy day. There will be some great groups coming. Keri Lewis from the Interval House of Ottawa will be here. Luke's Place support and resource centre for women and children will be here, with Pamela Cross. The Moose Hide Campaign will be here. Partage au Masculin and WoodGreen Community Services will be here.

Thank you very much. Do I see adjournment for the day? That's fantastic.