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**Thursday, May 23, 2013**



**Chair**

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe**



## Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thursday, May 23, 2013

•(1105)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP)):** Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to call the 79th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to order. We will now begin our proceedings.

We will spend the first hour speaking with Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk via videoconference. She is appearing as an individual and has already given her opening statement.

Ms. Benson-Podolchuk, thank you for appearing before the committee a second time, to give members a chance to ask you questions about your statement.

We will begin with members' questions, and we will hear from another witness during our second hour.

I would just like to let the committee members know that Ms. Bowes-Sperry wasn't able to join us today, even though we were hoping to hear from her. We will see whether we can invite her to appear next Tuesday, during our second hour.

On that note, I will hand the floor over to Ms. Truppe.

You have seven minutes.

[English]

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

To the witness, thank you for coming back today so we have the opportunity to ask you some questions.

In your book *Women Not Wanted*, you mentioned that despite having experienced workplace harassment, it was only after taking the RCMP harassment workshop that you truly realized what you had been experiencing was actually harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace. Could you describe for us what this course was about that allowed you to realize that it was harassment?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk (As an Individual):** It became so normalized that I really believed everybody else, all other women, were treated the same way. In the class there was a group of us. It's funny, I was just talking to my partner yesterday about that. We broke off into little groups and we had to explain what an ethical dilemma was and also a situation that we experienced. Everybody else said something, and I thought that seemed fine and normal, but when I told them something that happened to me, their mouths just dropped to the ground and they couldn't believe it. They said, "Sherry, you're not supposed to put up with that. Didn't you know

that?" In training they never told us anything about that. They didn't tell us that you have the right to say, "Don't do that". They didn't tell us how to defend ourselves within the RCMP and within our own detachments when it came to harassment. What harassment could be was never, ever discussed. Specifically, they never talked about abuse of power either.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** How long were you an RCMP officer before you actually had any type of training?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Oh, gee, I think it was—

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Or did you have any training before that particular time?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** The only harassment training I received was almost at the end of my service.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** How many years was that?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I would say I had about 16 years in before I received my first harassment training workshop.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** That's a long time. You were in the RCMP for 16 years and that was the first time you had harassment training?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Yes.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Was there training available and they just didn't give it to individuals who started later, so that new people were taking it, or was there no harassment training for anyone?

•(1110)

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** When I joined in 1989, there wasn't anything. I believe probably over the years, as things sort of popped up within the....

In Canada and in the Canadian Forces, they were encouraging anti-harassment training at that time. The commissioner in the early 1990s said, "Well, we don't have a problem; we don't need that kind of training."

However, I guess as lawsuits popped up and there were these whispers across Canada of harassment, they did begin to have harassment training, but I didn't receive any of it until later in my service.

I had asked for the training when I first saw some of these courses popping up, but because I was either off duty sick with my injury or stress leave, I was never given the opportunity. In training, though, I think they had started that.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** As we found out from some of the other witnesses, there is training for new hires and there is continuous training. This is part of what we want to find out. Just because you start in 1989, it doesn't mean you don't need training in 1999. There should be continuous training so that you're always apprised of what is harassment, of what is right and what is not right, even on the other end of the stick, the harasser as opposed to the harassee. There should be continuous training. I'm surprised that it was 16 years before you had your first workshop.

Would a confidential reporting process have helped? Would you have felt comfortable with that?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Oh, that's funny, because in 2004, I think, when someone phoned me saying they were doing a confidential report on harassment in the RCMP, I said, "How much time do you have?" I rattled on to them for about 45 minutes. I asked them if anything was going to actually happen, and said, "Phone me at home, if you want, because I have another five hours, if you have the time."

This was before I wrote my book. Now it would be easy just to mail my book and say, "Read it and then get back to me."

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Would access to a designated workplace harassment adviser have helped? Again, we found with some of the witnesses we've had that some of them have designated workplace harassment advisers. If you have a problem, you go there. You don't necessarily have to go to your superior or anything if that makes you feel uncomfortable.

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I think that's a good idea, but really, policies are only as effective as the people who enforce them. If you have a workplace adviser, that's wonderful. But if he or she goes to the next chain of command, and that person thinks these are just silly little complaints, then nothing will be resolved. Eventually that just becomes a toxic workplace.

The entire RCMP organization and federal government employees have to buy into this idea that having a harassment-free, bully-free workplace is in the best interests of everybody for the emotional and financial parts of an organization.

Think about it. People are on sick leave for five years. If they're getting paid \$90,000, that's a lot of money. I think they would rather be working in a healthy workplace than sitting at home and stressing.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Yes, absolutely. I agree with you. It's not a good place for anyone to be in. We can all almost identify with what you're saying, but until it actually happens to one specifically, nobody really knows what you went through.

You mentioned that you've encountered other women who have had similar experiences to yours. In speaking with them, was it also training that caused them to label their experiences as sexual harassment, or did they know they were sexually harassed?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Some of those who have spoken to me are older, in their fifties or sixties, so this would have happened, like, 35 years ago. As a woman you sort of accepted it.

For some younger officers and civilians, with sexual harassment and gender imbalance becoming more well known, and the label becoming more known, there's a title to what's happening to them,

and yes, they have identified it as sexual harassment or harassment in the workplace.

**The Chair:** You have only 10 seconds left.

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

[Translation]

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

We now turn to Ms. Hughes, for seven minutes.

[English]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP):** Thank you very much.

Unfortunately, I wasn't here for your presentation, but I read it last night. I could actually relate to it, having worked in a workplace where I was sexually harassed.

I worked for probation and parole services, and I remember when the mandate came in for harassment training and everybody had to take it. I remember going to this one institution for that training and someone walked in and said, "I'm not sitting beside that person," and took their chair and moved it away. I know how it feels and how that other person must have felt. Here we were in a harassment training course. It was already there and that poisoned environment just continued to build.

We know that it's not just the employees who need to take this training. Supervisors, managers, and everyone in the workplace should take these courses. Regardless of whether someone has taken a course or not, we continue to see these events take place.

With the recent story that broke involving Staff Sergeant Caroline O'Farrell, we see it's the same thing again. You and she had repeatedly mentioned this to your superiors and very little action was taken, or if action was taken, the victim was actually victimized again.

Many experts have agreed that one of the first barriers to reporting sexual harassment in the workplace is the fear of retaliation, which you have talked about, as has the staff sergeant. In the RCMP, have you seen the existence of a mechanism, effective or not, that aims to avoid and prevent reprisals? I am wondering if you have seen something like that.

●(1115)

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** There was nothing there, no. It took me a long time to find my voice and stand up to what was happening to me in my first detachment, because I knew there would be a negative impact right away, and I was not surprised, because there was.

Poor Caroline. My heart broke when I read the article in the paper yesterday. She's absolutely right. There isn't anything that would stop somebody from retribution. The policies are only as effective as the command and control, the people who are above the abuser. It goes all the way up to the top. If nobody is willing to say that the person is allowed to make a complaint and there's not going to be any negative impact.... I haven't seen anything and I don't know if they have anything in place at the moment.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** I worked in the justice field and you worked in the justice field. Some people tend to wonder how come they didn't know any better; how could they not recognize this; how could they not know their rights. The thing is that we do recognize it, but the more we speak out, sometimes that's when the retaliation comes in. I'm wondering if you know of any other women, aside from Caroline, who have been discharged and who have had similar experiences while serving in the RCMP.

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I think there are 300 people in the lawsuit right now that could probably identify with that. I think a lot of them are still serving.

I've been approached several times by people who are in the RCMP. They phone me to tell me that they've read my book or they've heard about me or they know about the lawsuits that are going on and they are afraid to come forward. The first thing I ask is whether they're safe. You just never know how things can escalate.

I'm sorry you had those experiences, because they do leave a scar on people. For me, there were a lot of subtle things before I realized it was actually almost criminal behaviour. It was the little things. You look back now and you can see how damaging it was and what harassment really looks like. Basically, it's bullying. You can put another label on it, but someone who harasses you is a bully. A bully in the workplace, a bully in the military, a bully at school, a bully in cyberspace, they're all doing the same thing. Their intent is to have power over someone and to wound and destroy.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** I want to get some sense because I know there's a variety of people who have indicated they're part of this lawsuit. As far as you know, do you know if this is ongoing within the RCMP and other federally regulated workplaces?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Do you mean the harassment problems?

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** That's right.

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Definitely. Just because there's a lot of public attention doesn't mean.... The problem now is it goes underground. The abuse or the bullying and harassing will no longer be so overt. It will be that silent kind of shunning. It will be words that are unspoken, actions, things like that. This is what shunning looks like: Imagine coming to work and nobody talks to you. The phone rings and instead of saying, "Carol, the phone is for you", they just hold it up, if you're working on a file. Instead of saying, "Carol, there's a phone call for you", they just write "somebody called" on a sticky note. I think that's still happening; not all the time, but as I said, because there's a lot of attention right now, it will go underground.

• (1120)

[Translation]

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

[English]

Madam O'Neill Gordon, you have the floor for seven minutes.

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

To the witness, thank you for taking time to come back with us today. As you know, we've been doing a lot of work on this study,

and it is very important to all of our committee that individuals go to work each day knowing that their workplace will be free of sexual harassment as you face all the other challenges that one has in a day's work.

Earlier you shared copies of correspondence from both inside and outside the RCMP on the topic of your experiences. In your book *Women Not Wanted* you mention that you did not begin as a good note taker, but subsequently developed the skill. This is a skill that takes learning. Can you describe how you see this as being a very important skill, and how important it is to maintain this kind of information?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** That's an excellent question. I tell people when they're having problems the same thing: document, document, document. It started out just when things would happen and I thought I was never going to remember things so I would just write down that I was at the detachment, the people who were there, the date and time. As I gathered notes, I was able to start to look back to see if there was a pattern of abuse.

When I was writing my book, it was a lot easier to prove my case when I wanted to see a lawyer, when I wanted to go to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, because they would ask me what evidence I had. This happened two years ago. They don't want to go just by memory. They prefer to have something in writing.

I had boxes of stuff, of documents that I could show, e-mails and letters in which people were saying that I shouldn't have reported my partner being drunk, and I had no sense of humour about the door falling on my head. Of course, I kept that and that's perfect evidence of what abuse of power looks like and how the retribution is on people who make complaints. I tell people all the time about the importance of documenting.

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon:** Yes, that was very important and it was good that you had all those facts written down. Is there anything else that you would recommend to a woman experiencing a similar situation at work? Is there any advice you might give her about what to do, or who to engage?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Definitely always remember self-care. If you don't feel safe, really physically safe at work, then get out. If you can't find somebody within the organization who can be supportive, find someone outside so that you always have someone to speak to, to share your feelings with, someone who can give you some positive feedback on, maybe, different ways to communicate. And don't blame yourself for something that's happening. The only person someone can control is themselves. If you're being abused at work, take care of yourself. Document things. Try to have a healthy balance at home, at least. Seek legal advice, if needed. Know your policies, procedures, and regulations at work. All businesses now have them.

I know the RCMP has a lot of these policies and they're great, but, as I said, they're only as effective as the people who enforce them. So for women and men, I just tell them to document, self-care, and know their policies and the laws on harassment, and their rights.

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon:** That's good advice. We find, and probably you do as well, that more and more people are now speaking out. Do you think this is the result of the training they are getting? Do you think that had you had training earlier, it would have helped you a lot more?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I'm not sure if it would have helped me. I think I would have recognized....

I'll go back right to the beginning. Right in training, we are silently seduced, is the best way to say it. We are silently seduced to believe that we are better because we wear the uniform.

For many people, to protect the image of the uniform, they will do whatever they can. If that means abusing somebody else, harassing someone else, bullying someone else to maintain the image of that RCMP organization, then they will do that. I don't know how you're going to change that. It's going to be difficult, but that's where it has to start. It's not the uniform that reflects the person, it's the person who reflects the uniform.

Does that help?

• (1125)

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon:** Yes. For sure we all admire and owe great respect to those uniforms when we see them, of course.

In your book, *Women not Wanted*, you describe the grievance process at the time of your first grievance as having 30 different stages throughout it, and two levels of decision, and then finally access to the external review committee, and decisions sent to the commissioner. In between all of these steps you are under pressure to meet short deadlines for submission of documents.

While you were in the middle of this process, the rules changed and some of the stages between the initial letter and the decision by the commissioner were removed. Could you please describe the difference in the initial process as compared to the changes that were then made?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** My grievance against the medical discharge in fact took six years. As a result, at the very end there were recommendations by the external review board to make changes to the grievance process. They were saying this person was off almost six years while this was going on, and if they would have had shorter timelines, fewer stages in the grievance process, perhaps this could have been resolved a lot earlier.

Basically, when a grievance goes on that long, it becomes so polarized: them against me. It's like anything. Then it becomes very difficult to return to work. Basically, it was shortened down to about three stages, and each stage had an opportunity to be mediated. It's more efficient now; however, there's still opportunity for further abuses with regard to the internal process of who's involved in a grievance and who has power in the grievance.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. O'Neill Gordon.

Ms. Sgro, you have seven minutes.

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Podolchuk, I'm glad we have you here, and I'm glad to see you're still smiling.

How is it the RCMP managed to get away with using the code of conduct investigations rather than criminal law? Many of the things you and others have mentioned involve sexual assault, not harassment. Instead of dealing with it like any other company would do, which would be criminal action, why has the RCMP for so many years been able to get away with this?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** That's the million-dollar question. I really would like to know what an effective answer would be to that.

The problem that I've seen is the fact that in the internal process, when people are making complaints, the RCMP is handling them. As you have seen this last year or two, when the serious complaints come forward, the RCMP handles them. You're right that most businesses would say that this is fraud, this is sexual assault, this is to be tried criminally. They go straight to the code of conduct.

According to the policy, you can only get a maximum of 10 days' suspension. Hopefully with the amendments, there can be some people who are actually fired. But I'm not sure how the outrageous conduct is going to ever be defined.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** For the information of the committee, I have some evidence that I'll be referring to. I'll give it to the clerk and ask that it be distributed to all members of the committee. I believe it's critically important evidence as part of the study we are doing. No one in Parliament or anywhere else could read the kind of evidence I'm going to give you and not feel that more needs to be done, over and above what we're doing right now.

As many of us have heard:

RCMP Staff Sergeant Caroline O'Farrell has commenced legal proceedings against the RCMP and several of its members for damages she sustained while she was a member of the Musical Ride in the mid 80's. It had long been a dream of S/Sgt. O'Farrell to be on the Ride, and she was one of the first women to be admitted. In the end, it turned out to be a nightmare, when she was assaulted, sexually assaulted, abused and discriminated against by the other members of the Ride.

All of these acts were either witnessed by or known to her supervisors who did nothing to stop them or to hold the perpetrators accountable. Any efforts S/Sgt. O'Farrell took to protect herself or to obtain redress only resulted in her being further abused, victimized and isolated.

We've heard that from Sherry Lee and others.

S/Sgt. O'Farrell was ultimately removed from the Ride, not by virtue of any inadequacy on her part, but only because her supervisors felt it would be best for her own protection.

An investigation was conducted at the time, and the conclusion was that there were over 100 substantiated incidents of assault and abuse.

An example of the kind of abuse she had to endure is a particular incident in which some of the male members—and I'm sure Sherry Lee has heard these things before—swarmed her from behind and yanked the stirrup of her horse from her hand. She punched some of them and tried to push them away with a penknife folded in her fist. She also punched other constables. They formed a circle, closed in, filled a wheelbarrow full of cold water, and carried her forcefully into the riding school where she was restrained. They lifted the wheelbarrow over her head, drenching her head and body in cold water, right down to her bra and underpants. Then they dragged her along by her arms through the mixture of dirt, shavings, manure, and urine. Once they had finished with her, she sat there, her head fuming, alone and humiliated. All the while, they were laughing and videotaping the incident. Afterwards, they all took off. The incident was videotaped by a particular constable and witnessed by 18 other course members, who were walking their horses at the time. The incident occurred within a few feet of the supervisors who had gone into the farrier's shop after learning that a shit-troughing was about to occur.

That is exactly the kind of incident this particular individual is referring to, and I will submit this as information that I think will be helpful for the committee as we move forward with this.

I'd also like to move a motion that we allow Caroline O'Farrell to appear before the committee. We know clearly from the rules of the committee that anyone coming and giving evidence before the committee does not violate the sub judice convention. It happens very often in standing committees where we have people come before us as part of a study, as long as it's relative to the study. That would help us to achieve the goal, which is to thoroughly understand this issue.

In 1988, this issue was raised in the House of Commons by one of my former colleagues, Sheila Copps. In 1988, the same issue was raised referring to Staff Sergeant Caroline O'Farrell.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Madam Sgro, you have one more minute.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** The response from the government of the day was that it was going to be taken care of. This isn't anything to do with partisan politics; these are serious issues in a federal police force that's here to protect Canadians, protect all of us.

I had meetings in Vancouver last week. More people are coming out, men and women, on this issue of harassment. I think it's critically important that we move forward and have a more thorough investigation.

My motion is simply to ask that the committee invite Caroline O'Farrell to appear before us.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

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

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Sorry, Sherry. I ran out of time. I would have asked for some comments back.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Sgro put forward a motion that we have to discuss and vote on.

[English]

Madam Benson-Podolchuk, we'll come back to you very soon. You can stay with us, but we will just debate that motion.

Madam Truppe, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to move that we adjourn the debate.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Truppe, we can't deal with your request.

We are going to vote on the motion.

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** I would like a recorded division, please.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** We'll have a recorded division, then.

I will ask the clerk to reread the motion, and then we'll have the recorded division.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Marlene Sandoval):** We have to deal with Ms. Truppe's motion to adjourn the debate. That is the matter we have to vote on.

**The Chair:** My apologies.

We will now vote on Ms. Truppe's motion that the debate be adjourned. If the motion carries, we then have to vote on Ms. Sgro's motion.

We are now going to vote on Ms. Truppe's motion that the debate be adjourned.

[English]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** It will be a recorded vote for both.

**The Chair:** It will be a recorded vote for this one first.

[Translation]

Madam Clerk, you may proceed with the vote.

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Madam Chair, just to clarify, does the motion not take precedence over the adjournment?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Truppe's motion that the debate be adjourned is in order. Therefore, we will vote on that motion.

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Appalling.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, you may go ahead with the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

**The Chair:** I'm being told that, because Ms. Truppe's motion carried, we can't debate Ms. Sgro's motion; the reason is that the debate has been adjourned. We will have to resume the debate another time.

Ms. Sgro, what just happened prevents me from allowing the committee to debate or vote on your motion. You still have—

**Mr. François Choquette:** Point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Madam Chair, I realize that you made your decision after consulting with the clerk. But this is the first time I've ever heard that we can't vote on a motion that is on the agenda because the proceedings are in camera. I believe Ms. Truppe's motion was for us to move in camera, was it not?

**The Chair:** That's not what it was, Mr. Choquette. I'll just clarify things so you fully understand what's happening now. Ms. Sgro put forward a motion. Ms. Truppe put forward another motion, which was to adjourn the debate. Her motion was in order, we voted on it, and it carried. That compels us to adjourn the debate on Ms. Sgro's motion. We can no longer discuss or vote on that. It was not a motion to move in camera; it was a motion to adjourn the debate.

Ms. Hughes, did you have another question?

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Yes.

[English]

I just wanted to clarify something. The vote we had was on adjournment of the debate on the motion. Now should we not be voting on the motion itself?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Unfortunately not, because that brought the debate to a complete halt. The clerk confirmed that the rules compel us to stop the debate entirely. The clerk told me that the vote has to be held after the debate. And since there was no debate, we can't hold a vote.

Ms. Sgro, did you have a comment on the same topic?

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Now that the debate has been adjourned, my motion will be on the floor at the next meeting of our committee.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** If you wish, you can put forward your motion again. It hasn't completely disappeared.

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** We have not voted on my motion. We've adjourned the debate, so my motion was not dealt with at all.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Precisely.

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** It would automatically be there the next time we convene our meeting.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** It's not automatic. It would be up to you to move your motion again before the committee. Your motion was not—

• (1140)

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Why do I have to bring it forward when I have already presented it?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** The debate on your motion was adjourned. The motion wasn't defeated, but someone on the committee has to request that we resume the debate on that motion. A committee member has to make that request, whether it's you or someone else, in order to resume that debate.

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Then I will move that we continue the debate on my motion now.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** The clerk of the committee is telling me the debate has been adjourned and that decision must be upheld for the duration of this meeting. Your motion can be dealt with another time, if a committee member so wishes, from the next meeting onward. The debate cannot, however, resume today because the motion to adjourn carried.

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** The clarification is, I don't believe I have to reintroduce my motion at the beginning of the next meeting. It should automatically be on the table for discussion at our next meeting.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** My understanding is that either you have to reintroduce it or someone else has to request that we resume the debate on the motion.

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Madam Chair, I will present it gladly.

I'm just saying that I don't think that's the process. I don't want to waste time on logistics here, I will move it at the next meeting, and if the parliamentary secretary chooses to adjourn the debate, we'll never get this finished. If that's the message they want to send out today to the women of Canada, when we're supposed to be celebrating the 140th anniversary of the RCMP, I think it's absolutely despicable, especially for a committee like this.

[Translation]

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

We will now move to Ms. Crockatt.

You have five minutes for your questions and answers.

[English]

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Thank you very much.

Sherry Lee, it's wonderful to see you again. Thank you for coming to committee, and I'm sorry we took up quite a bit of your time on the process.



I know that you are one of the first women who came forward to tell your story. I commend you for that. It must have taken a huge amount of courage.

Do you feel that your coming forward has made a difference? How do you feel about the process now that you're sitting here today, compared to where you started from, which I can imagine was in the depths of despair?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Wow. That's a very good question.

Coming forward was the most terrifying thing I've ever done, basically because I knew the history. I knew that the reaction would be negative and that the retribution would be quick and swift. I was correct on that, but I knew there were other people out there who were probably more terrified than I was.

As I said before, there were whispers. There were always whispers across the country, and now it's a roar, which is wonderful. I had to do that because I knew if I didn't, it was going to destroy me, and I thought it wasn't right. I have this fierce sense of justice and equality and I knew I had to find justice by speaking out.

On the equality part, I knew there were other people out there somewhere, both male and female, who were treated like I was, because as I said before, there were whispers. I hadn't seen anyone around me treated like I was, because I would have definitely spoken up for them. That's why I did that, and I've never regretted it.

As a matter of fact, I received an e-mail a little while ago from a gentleman who is still in and is having a difficult time. He's not sure if he wants to stay in the RCMP. He asked me if retiring at 20 years was worth it. I had to really do some thinking. I thought it was, because my mental, physical, and spiritual body was being destroyed. If I hadn't spoken out, if I hadn't written my book, which is my voice, then I don't think I would be here.

It's not that I wanted to make a decision to kill myself, it's just that I wanted to end the suffering, go to sleep, and not wake up. If I hadn't spoken up, I don't think I would be here. For people to speak up and say what has happened to them is very important to the healing process.

• (1145)

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** Now, do you feel that you've made a difference?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I think so, yes.

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** Can you explain how you think that you've made a difference?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I've made a difference for the justice and equality part for the people who are in my immediate sphere of influence, my partner and my daughter—she is a very strong feminist—and then, of course, people who are both RCMP and non-RCMP. When they speak to me, when they read my book, they see there's a variety of things that many people can relate to, the bullying, the harassment, the sexual violence, the intimidation, the fear, and then my journey from one side of despair to the other.

If I can do it, then they have hope. You want people to have hope. That's what keeps people from jumping off a bridge, or shooting themselves with their own gun, or dying from diseases brought on by

stress. I feel I have made a difference, and if nothing ever changed in my life, I would never regret speaking up and taking a chance, and being a further target, and writing my book and taking a chance with that. I would never regret that. I'm pleased that people—

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** That's great. Do you think you've been a catalyst for some institutional change that needed to happen?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I think after this, in 2002, with regard to the grievance process that was so confusing.... The problem with the grievance process at that time was that so many people retired or were promoted that nobody was really able to make a decision. They made some changes with regard to that, and the duty to accommodate. Of course, they didn't follow through with the duty to accommodate in my particular case. They did make some policy changes; I simply wasn't lucky enough to have the benefit of them. I feel happy because if I hadn't done that, they would still be doing the same thing. So after 140 years—

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** So there has been some positive.... Go ahead.

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** After 140 years, if they're still doing the same thing, they're still going to get the same results. It has to be an organizational shift with everybody.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Your time has expired.

[Translation]

Mr. Choquette, it's now your turn. You have five minutes.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be sharing my time with Mr. Morin.

Ms. Benson-Podolchuk, thank you for participating in our discussion.

This past February, the Commission for Public Complaints against the RCMP released a report entitled "Public Interest Investigation into RCMP Workplace Harassment: Final Report". It discusses the fact that harassment may be under-reported, because of, among other things, fear of reprisal and concern that the complaint may not achieve significant results.

From your experience and observations, do you believe sexual harassment is actually under-reported within the RCMP?

[English]

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Oh, definitely, and that's because people are afraid. People are terrified. The squeaky wheel gets bonked on the head. They're the ones who have the stalled careers. They're the ones who get further targeted for harassment or alienation within the detachment, or that particular rank. So, yes, I believe it is under-reported.

I looked over that new report by Commissioner Paulson on a gender-respectful workplace, and there are so many errors in it. Success, to him, would be that nobody reports. Well no, nobody was reporting before, because they were terrified. Simply because he's not receiving any reports doesn't mean there's not a problem, and there still will be a problem until they deal with the fear people have of reporting, and the fact that nothing is going to be done if they report. So they think, "Why would I bother?"

That's a very good question.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Choquette:** There's a real problem, then. People don't report it and that leads to an under-reporting of problems that likely still exist within the RCMP.

How do you think it would be possible to increase the number of reports made? What solutions would you suggest? You may have mentioned that already, but I'd like you to elaborate a bit further.

• (1150)

[*English*]

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** They have made some changes, which is great. The shift within the mindset of the organization and this culture of protectiveness is definitely going to take some time, because people have to buy into this idea of a respectful workplace.

For me, I think they would have to continue with the training, and not an online course where you just choose *a*, *b*, or *c*, and you pass. That means nothing. It's actually getting in the trenches with people who have been harassed, such as speaking to Catherine or the other women who have been involved and having people come and present exactly what it looks like. What does harassment look like? What is the impact?

As a business, they should realize they need to take care of their employees. They're losing so much money with people being on sick leave, spending it on the education, and spending money on not having people there. Improved training and conferences where people are actually interacting with victims of harassment would be one way.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you.

I will now turn it over to Mr. Morin.

**The Chair:** Mr. Morin, you have just over a minute.

**Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):** I have to say that, after listening to you and following your experience, I'm shocked. When will someone wake up and realize that the organization has suffered a tremendous blow by losing an employee with such a strong sense of justice?

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I get the sense that the harassment problem in that environment is similar to the kinds of things that happen in all other workplaces. People try to be friendly at first, paying compliments and such, and the behaviour escalates until there is no respect at all. You are objectified and victimized.

I don't think that can change from the inside. Those in charge, especially in the government, have to take over the process in order

to bring about a genuine and significant change in culture. Those people have to realize that all the actions you and hundreds of your colleagues have been subjected to do not constitute jokes or funny remarks, but devastating incidents. It's devastating not just for the victims like yourself and your colleagues, but also for the entire country, because everything would run much more efficiently if the workplaces were more harmonious.

What do you think?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** You just make me want to cry when you say that. I've been saying that for so long. After my—

**The Chair:** Sorry, Madam Benson-Podolchuk, but I have to interrupt you. Unfortunately the question was too long, and the time is up.

I now pass the floor to Madam Ambler, for five minutes.

I'm sorry, Madam Benson-Podolchuk.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC):** Thank you so much.

I'm happy to let you answer that. It sounds as if you really wanted to. Please, take a minute to do so.

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I just wanted to say that the statement made me want to cry because after my second grievance, which took six years, there was a job opening up within the RCMP for the member assistance program, where an officer would go and help people who are having problems with grievances and anything within the RCMP. I thought, "Bingo! That's something I can do, even with my injured shoulder".

They refused to send me there because they said I would be too toxic and might create a negative opinion of the RCMP, when in fact the member assistance program officer is to help people get healthy. What they were really worried about was that I would get people to stand up, have a voice, and possibly make complaints about harassment or bullying that they might have been experiencing.

Yes, it was their loss.

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

I was looking back into my notes from when Commissioner Paulson spoke to us. Specifically, I wanted to ask you about Bill C-42, the Enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police Accountability Act, which passed third reading in March.

Commissioner Paulson did say he thought this legislation would help the RCMP have the tools it needed. Would you agree with that?

• (1155)

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I went through it. I took my experiences with how these new things would help. I have it here. I could always e-mail it to you, if you want it. I have a few concerns about how it would benefit because policies are only as effective as the people who enforce them. I think there are some really good ideas, and I think it's important to be creative. One thing I did see is the commissioner has a little too much power.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** Did you write about that in your book, *Women Not Wanted*? Is there anything about the commissioner and the concentration of power in that office?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** Yes, I did mention some of that, but it was put out in the second edition in 2010. That's before Commissioner Paulson came on the scene.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** One of the other things he said, and that the RCMP told us when they were here, is that currently about 20% of police officers and RCMP are women, but that their recruiting benchmark is 35%. They're increasing the feeder pool and their targets are ambitious, but they think they're going to meet them.

Do you think this will help encourage women to speak out, if they reach the target?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** I'm not sure, because they had similar goals 25 years ago. In 1989 they wanted to get it up to 25% and even though they increased the number of women, we were dropping like flies. Our life expectancy within the RCMP was one to five years, or three to five years. I'm not sure if anything is going to change without that cultural shift within the organization. However, I do believe that yes, having more women makes it safer for other women, at least if they can have someone to share with, but if people are seduced into protecting the RCMP, having a woman beside you who thinks the RCMP is perfect and will not defend you is useless.

It has to be a cultural mind-shift with everybody, including a group of females who are joining. If you're not standing together, then you're divided, and from my experience that's what the RCMP counts on.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** It concerned me a lot when you talked about the tensions causing the harassment to go underground, and those little things like not being given your phone messages, essentially making it so difficult to do your job that you look incompetent. Would you suggest to every woman in the RCMP today to document every little incident like that, even if it seems very small at the time?

**Ms. Sherry Lee Benson-Podolchuk:** That's a good question. I would say that they should trust their gut. Are they the only one this is happening to? Does it feel right? Sometimes people make mistakes and accept that, but then have enough courage to say, "Excuse me, you know the phone was for me". Why didn't you challenge them? What makes them think they have the right to ignore me? What makes them think they have the right to not call me by my name when I come into the detachment? What makes them think they have the right to not give me my messages? Things like that, and then follow the chain of command, but definitely document, yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Benson-Podolchuk.

[Translation]

Now we'll break for a few minutes to give us a chance to connect with our next witness.

Ms. Benson-Podolchuk, thank you kindly for meeting with the committee a second time so that the members could ask you their questions. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

• (1155)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1200)

**The Chair:** We are now resuming the 79th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Here with us, as we begin the second half of our meeting, is Linda Collinsworth.

[English]

Madam Collinsworth is an associate professor of psychology at Millikin University.

Madam, thank you very much for being with us today. You will have 10 minutes or less for your opening remarks. I will have to cut you off at 10 minutes, and then we'll go to the question and answer period. Members will have an opportunity to ask you questions. Once again, thank you for being with us.

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth (Associate Professor of Psychology, Millikin University, As an Individual):** Thank you very much. It is indeed an honour to have been asked to present to your committee on the issue of sexual harassment.

I certainly commend the committee on its efforts in addressing the needs of women in Canada. As issues get addressed in one country, the attention generated spreads to other places around the world, so I thank you for your efforts. I would also like to thank your staff, who have been very helpful in arranging the details to be able to present to you from my home city in the United States.

As you know, my research and area of expertise concern the problem of sexual harassment. Although I have done research on sexual harassment in schools, the military, and public housing, I am going to confine my remarks today to sexual harassment in the workplace because that is the focus of your current investigation.

First, I want to say that I am a social scientist, not a lawyer, not an attorney. Because sexual harassment is a cause for litigation, people frequently assume that the sexual harassment I talk about is equated with the sexual harassment that is a tort claim in the United States. It is not. I'll be talking about the social scientific findings on the topic of sexual harassment. The legal world and the social science world may overlap at times, but they are not identical.

As a social scientist, I find it important to ensure that when we are talking about a topic, we are on the same page about what that topic is, so I will be using the term "sexual harassment" to mean uninvited sex-related behaviour that is unwanted by and offensive to its target. Although different researchers may operationalize sexual harassment in different ways, the research in which I have been most involved and on which a number of additional social scientists rely conceptualizes sexual harassment as consisting of three types: gender animosity, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion.

I should also note that I will only be reporting on the research as it relates to women.

My research is based on an instrument that was developed by Dr. Louise Fitzgerald and her colleagues at the University of Illinois. The instrument is called the "Sexual Experiences Questionnaire". This instrument measures the behaviours that are described in slide 1. I believe you all have copies of some slides that I prepared. There's gender animosity, and there are some examples of what that consists of, unwanted sexual attention, and then what sexual coercion is.

Using this measurement instrument, Dr. Fitzgerald and her colleagues have developed and validated a model of sexual harassment that specifies antecedents and outcomes of sexual harassment in the workplace. The model has been shown to apply to other cultures and multiple organizations, including the studies conducted by the U.S. military in their studies of gender equity in the armed forces. Slide 2 shows you Dr. Fitzgerald's and her colleagues' comprehensive model.

I was asked to talk about the psychological and other consequences of sexual harassment, so my remarks are going to be confined to the right side of the model, though I could talk about the left side if you were curious about it.

Numerous studies have documented that harassment has serious consequences for the targets, including job and work related detriments, as well as negative health and psychological related outcomes. We'll look first at work consequences.

Slide 3 shows that experiencing sexual harassment has numerous negative consequences for women's work situations. Slides 4, 5, 6, and 7 are the result of research done in the United States involving women involved in a class action lawsuit. These are provided as illustrations only. These same results have been found to be replicated regardless of the organization in which the studies have been done. As you can see, as the frequency of sexual harassment increases, job stress increases, co-worker and supervisor satisfaction decreases, and the intention to leave the job increases.

• (1205)

We also can see from the model that there are negative health-related symptoms. There's really an exhaustive list of consequences that are related to health, but it includes fatigue, headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, teeth grinding, eating disorders, nausea, and many more.

Finally, the psychological consequences of sexual harassment are well documented in the research literature. As the frequency of sexual harassment increases, self-esteem declines, life satisfaction declines, anxiety and depression increase, and the risk of developing post traumatic stress disorder increases. There are some slides that show that as well.

The material I've presented to you today covers research that spans decades of research in multiple organizations. There has been no research that I know of that has findings counter to what I have presented. It is well documented in the social science literature that experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace leads to numerous negative consequences for the targets of the harassment.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions that I can.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Collinsworth.

We are now going to Madam Young. You have the floor for seven minutes, Madam.

**Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC):** Thank you very much for that, Ms. Collinsworth. I'm sorry we received your slides a little late so I wasn't able to review them as much as I would like. Having said that, I do have some questions. In 2009 you stated in an article:

Social science research has repeatedly documented a connection between sexually harassing experiences and negative psychological outcomes.

I think that is very logical. Could you elaborate on this connection between sexual harassment and psychological health?

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** The theoretical framework from which we operate has to do with stress. We conceptualize stress as coming from multiple sources. It's an individual variable about how well any individual will cope with the stress they experience in their lives. When an individual is under stress, they attempt to cope with that by any means they have. When the stressor exceeds their resources, then we begin to see psychological detriments to their psychological health.

When we think about sexual harassment, there are so many factors. If we're talking about it in the workplace there are so many factors that make sexual harassment a significant stressor for any target. There's research, which I didn't report here, which shows that the negative psychological effects begin to take place almost immediately, in fact, after a single incident. Therefore, by the time someone has experienced a second episode or a second event involving sexual harassment, we begin to see a decline in psychological well-being. The effects kick in very quickly in terms of one's experience.

As we explain those consequences, we think about it as being a significant stressor for any person who is a target.

**Ms. Wai Young:** Could you talk to us about resilience? What can we do to help build or support resilience in victims who are experiencing this in the workplace? For example, what kinds of things, victim programs, services, counselling, might be helpful?

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** All of the psychological outcomes I've alluded to and mentioned in my remarks can be addressed through interventions with the individual, such as therapy or group counselling. At the same time, some of these symptoms don't necessarily need that kind of an individual intervention. You can do things in the workplace to help people recover from these experiences.

Mainly, the thing that is most supportive for individuals who have been targeted with sexual harassment is that the organization be supportive of their experiences. Part of that model you have—did you get to look at the model I sent? The part of the model I'm interested in you seeing is the side that has the organizational climate, which has an effect on the outcomes over and above what the sexual harassment has. So yes, sexual harassment is a significant stressor, but there is an added stressor that comes from an organization that does not believe the target when she complains. There is an added stressor if the woman feels that if she complains, her job, her position, or her work duties will be at risk.

The work that's been done in the military actually shows that having meaningful sanctions against the offender is one of the most powerful actions that can be taken to prevent sexual harassment.

These three components of an organizational climate have an impact over and above harassment.

When I talk to my students about what we can do about this issue—because people say, “Well, sexual harassment is going to occur”—the good news is that if the organization, which has power over the climate in which workers work, can change the climate, then sexual harassment will decrease and the impact on women will be minimized as well. So there is good news about this model.

•(1215)

**Ms. Wai Young:** Thank you for that.

Madam Chair, how much more time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have a bit less than a minute.

**Ms. Wai Young:** I do have one more question.

Ms. Collinsworth, I'd like to share with you that obviously we in Canada and at this committee are exploring sexual harassment in the federal workplace. We would like to get to a place where there is zero tolerance for it.

What other suggestions or ideas could you give us—and I think you've already given us a number—about how we can get to that? We do not believe that sexual harassment in the federal workplace should be tolerated.

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** That organizational tolerance is, as I said, a very important part of this whole dynamic, because it leads to sexual harassment and it has this overriding impact on the outcomes of sexual harassment.

The other part of the model that I would point you to is the gender context which influences how much harassment occurs. Gender context has to—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Madam Collinsworth, I have to interrupt you, because the time has expired.

We will now go to Madam Hughes. You have the floor for seven minutes.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Thank you very much.

I appreciate having received this. Just so you know, we actually received it yesterday so we had plenty of time to bring it with us.

You indicated serious consequences, and you talked about the psychological aspect of this. The fact is that in workplaces, whether

federal or non-federal, people react differently to the harassment that takes place, whether it's sexual harassment or the type of bullying that goes on as well.

I'm trying to get some sense of whether you've come to some type of a conclusion as to why it affects certain people certain ways, and not others. Some people seem to be able to get over that hump a lot more easily than others can. It's not that we discount the fact that this happens; it's just that I don't know if it's the severity of it. I'm trying to get some sense of whether you did some research on that.

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** Yes. We have attempted to operationalize what we mean by severity, because the more severe the harassment, the more negative consequences there are. Severity has been operationalized in this way, and I'm not sure if I'll be able to remember all facets of it.

One of the facets is whether the individual is targeted herself or whether it's more of a general denigration of women, if that's the kind of harassment you're experiencing. It tends to be more severe if the harassment is directed at you, if there is difficulty trying to escape from the situation, or if you're unable. Many of the women we have interviewed and surveyed depended on their job for their insurance. It may be insurance used for their children, for example. People will ask why they didn't quit their job. Well, that's not an easy thing to do. The more the woman is in a situation that she can't escape from, the more severe the consequences are for her.

If it's physical, that makes it more severe than if it is merely verbal. Most of the harassment that occurs in the workplace according to this study is not physical, but if it is physical, that makes it worse.

•(1220)

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** I appreciate—

Go ahead.

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** There are objective factors around what happens exactly to the person that makes it more stressful. The introduction to your question seemed to be getting at why the same thing may happen to this one person who then develops PTSD, and the same thing happens to another woman who recovers fairly quickly or easily. Those are individual differences that do exist. We haven't been able to examine every single individual difference, but one of the things that has garnered the most interest, at least in the legal arena in the United States, has to do with previous victimization. We know that previous victimization makes one more vulnerable to developing anxiety and PTSD, even if the stressor is not as severe.

We know the rates of childhood sexual abuse in the United States are somewhere around 25%. If someone comes from a home where she may have experienced sexual or physical abuse as a child, or maybe she's partnered with someone who is abusive, all of that victimization can predispose her then to greater damage, even if it's not as severe as what her previous trauma was.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Thank you. I don't have a lot of time.

So in the workplace, for example, they can't seem to get away from that person as easily as if it happened in the public somewhere. The reason I ask that question is that I have worked in the mental health field and the criminal justice field, and some of our colleagues who we thought were really strong all of a sudden we saw the depression because of something that had occurred. All in all, whether it occurs once or several times, it's not acceptable.

The previous witness indicated that with the RCMP, basically there's a 10-day suspension in place. That's the worst outcome at this point. Then they go back to work. I believe it's probably a 10-day suspension with pay.

Would you see that as a positive move to try to prevent or to set an example by having a 10-day suspension? Would you consider this a light sentence or a heavy sentence?

**The Chair:** Quickly, Madam Collinsworth.

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** That's a really hard judgment to make, so far removed from knowing the circumstances of what occurred. Sexual harassment occurs along a continuum in which some women are groped or some women are called on the phone all the time. There's just a whole range of harassment.

Here's what I do know. It's always better to have some sort of sanctions for the offender. It can't stop there, however. The woman continues to work in a workplace then, where perhaps people have become alienated against her. Maybe they're friends with the offender and they'll ask why she reported him. They'll say, "Don't you know he has a family at home he has to take care of?"

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Sorry to interrupt you, Madam Collinsworth, but time has expired.

Madam Bateman, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you so much, Dr. Collinsworth, for your research and the work you've done to make change, positive change, and not just for the women in the United States, because I know we will benefit from your research.

I am most particularly interested in your comments about sanctions. We in this committee want to make a difference for all employees, not just women, but all employees in the federal public service or any related organization, and make sure that we know how to create a better harassment-free workplace, a respectful workplace.

The current status of the federal Government of Canada is that we.... You were just talking about this, so feel free to expound upon your thought with regard to the previous question.

Our current approach, Dr. Collinsworth, is that we protect the harasser in some cases more than we protect the victim. Our government is very interested in protecting victims on every level. Interestingly enough, in the public service of Canada, we erase any trace of harassment from the record of a gentleman or a woman who has harassed, who has either just harassed or sexually harassed an

individual. This record disappears in two years, and then that person is free to go on with a clear record, have another job, and harass again in a different work circle.

Your comments, Dr. Collinsworth, about sanctions, and how you have documentary evidence indicating that clear sanctions actually give greater clout to the prevention, is I think a crucial piece for all of us. It's the taxpayer who pays for our public service. I look at your research, and I can see that the cost associated with this is enormous, not just to the person but to the entire system.

If you could expand on the sanctions, then, I would be very grateful.

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** The research seems to indicate that sanctions are effective for multiple reasons. If someone is sanctioned for their misconduct, it communicates, first, to people who are potential offenders that this will not be tolerated in the workplace. If they do it, they're going to have sanctions or consequences.

It also communicates to the potential targets, or to the women in this case, that we, the organization, take this seriously, and if they come forward, they're not risking anything. They're not risking being demoted. They're not risking losing your job. They're not risking being retaliated against by the organization, that it will take their complaints seriously.

Those things are what climate is all about. It communicates to both men and women in the workplace that the organization takes it seriously, and that there will be consequences if they choose to behave in this way. It is just an extremely important message to send to employees.

Our experience is that in organizations, such as in corporations, at the corporate level they seem to get it. It's getting it down into the plants and to the local organizations that there seems to be this disconnect.

If you as an organization tell your employees that you take this seriously, then you have to back it up. You can't just say that you have zero tolerance in the workplace. You have to follow it up with these kinds of concrete actions if someone steps over the line.

The problem, of course—

• (1230)

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Forgive me, Dr. Collinsworth, but perhaps you could expand on some of what those concrete actions are.

In terms of consequences, clearly you can't create a respectful workplace without that structure, and yet we are quite hampered with.... You know, we have unions protecting the rights of all employees. We have a respectful workplace and we want to respect the rights of all employees. Yet somebody who gets off scot-free after sexually harassing somebody—I mean, it really can't be tolerated in the public service of Canada—their slate is wiped clean after two years.

What kind of concrete sanctions have you seen be effective?

**Prof. Linda Collinworth:** They run the gamut. Frequently some of the most effective are graduated sanctions, depending on how severe the first incident is, of course. There are suspensions, suspensions without pay, up to and including dismissal from their job. Certainly that should be on the table as a potential consequence if they choose to engage in a pattern of harassment, again, depending on how severe it is. If sexual assault has occurred as part of the harassment, then I don't think you say they're suspended for one day and they can come back the next day. The sanctions need to be set up in such a way that they are graduated at the same time that allowance is made for the severity of the incident we're talking about.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Do you have documentation of various organizations such as the military and corporations where dismissal is in their sexual harassment policy? Quite frankly, as a mother of a daughter, I don't want my child—she's only 15 now—to be at risk, and certainly not in a workplace.

**The Chair:** You've got 30 seconds.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Dr. Collinworth.

**Prof. Linda Collinworth:** A study was done in our U.S. military which showed that sanctions were the most effective tool an organization can use. I can direct you to that study if you would like to have a copy of it.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** I would very much like that.

**Prof. Linda Collinworth:** I would have to do some research for you on other sanctions in other organizations.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Bateman.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Thank you.

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

It is now Ms. Sgro's turn.

You have seven minutes.

[*English*]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, Dr. Collinworth, for being here with us today and helping us with this important study.

The issue of the RCMP is the one I am most concerned about, and the kind of sexual abuse and harassment and so on that has gone on. I realize you may not be that familiar with it, but the government of the day has introduced a bill that would give the commissioner more power to suspend people and so on, rather than this code of conduct. Some people are concerned that putting more power in the hands of the top-notch commissioners is not the answer, because clearly some of the rank and file today are being told that with the new legislation, they'd better just do as they're told, otherwise they could be fired instantly, if the commissioners wanted to do that.

Some people are saying it's just another form of intimidation to be used within the service. Certainly from our perspective, we question whether that's the way you deal with changing the culture of an organization.

Given the fact that this is very much a male-dominated organization, and women are coming into a field where they're

clearly not wanted by many—and maybe this is the older generation, and maybe they all need to leave and bring in the younger ones who will have more respect for women—why do they seem to feel so threatened by having females in a male-dominated profession like the RCMP?

**Prof. Linda Collinworth:** Most people in an organization are invested in some way in the organization. They're invested in their position; they're invested in the power they have. They may also be very dedicated. I'm not suggesting they're not dedicated to the cause, their profession, but obviously they have other kinds of personal investments. So it's not unusual when women make inroads into certain professions in certain organizations that there is resistance, there is pushback from males who have dominated in the field.

It doesn't mean it can't change. Obviously we've seen all kinds of changes take place, but there is always pushback. It's a power struggle among factions of who's going to get to say what.

Regarding your first remarks about handing over power to administrators who will use this as a threat against employees, I don't think that's an appropriate sanction at all. You don't simply tell an administrator someone is sexually harassing somebody. Obviously, there has to be due process and examination of the charges and some sort of system whereby both sides are heard, that sort of thing.

• (1235)

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** I certainly agree with you. This is not a new problem for us in the RCMP. This has been going on for at least 25 years that I can research back into the particular lawsuit that was raised yesterday here in Canada.

Part of the rationale from the head of the RCMP is that they did not have the ability to fire people. It was just a matter of shuffling people around and transferring people from one place to the other, rather than dealing with the issue head on.

One of the gentlemen I met within the RCMP last week said that when you make a complaint, you become a target because you are labelled a troublemaker even though you were very legitimate in what your concerns were, but they will just transfer you. Then there are units that wouldn't even want to accept you because you're labelled a troublemaker, and they don't want that either.

It's really intimidation in many ways.

What would you suggest our response to some of those comments should be?

**Prof. Linda Collinworth:** I don't know whether this will translate into French because it's an alliteration in English. This is so common, moving someone who has been found to have been a sexual harasser to another job. We call it pass the perpetrator. It happens all the time and it's completely inappropriate.

Individuals who have some sort of pattern of harassing either need to be educated....There needs to be an intervention of some sort for the person, not simply a sanction, but also some sort of intervention if you're going to keep them in the workplace, because if they have not changed their behaviour, obviously they are going to do it somewhere else.

Having said that, I'll recommend another researcher to you. His name is Dr. John Pryor. He has done research which shows that men differ in their likelihood to sexually harass, but even men who have a high likelihood to sexually harass, based on a measure he developed, will not harass if they are in an organization where there are sanctions and things he calls management norms, where the managers are modelling this. Sometimes it's the manager who is actually doing the harassing. That's communicating to the men in the organization that if their boss is doing it, they can do it too.

Dr. John Pryor has some good things to say about offenders.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** I think your last comments captured a big part of what the problems are in the RCMP.

Thank you very much, Dr. Collinsworth.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Sgro.

[Translation]

We are now beginning the second round of questions.

Ms. Truppe, the floor is yours.

[English]

You have five minutes.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I loved your pass the perpetrator reference. That was the first time we on this side, and probably both sides, heard that.

I want to talk about some of the recommendations as far as it would go for, say, an employee assistance program.

On February 25, Stats Canada released a report, "Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends". The report notes that following an incident of violence, Canadian women are statistically more likely than men to disclose the victimization to family and friends: 80% of women versus, say, 56% per men.

Would you say there's a need for access to social and personal support networks alongside the reporting and mediation of an incident of sexual harassment in the workplace? The reason I'm asking is that federal public service employees actually have access to an employee assistance program which provides e-counselling and referrals to local counsellors to assist public service employees in dealing with personal or workplace-related issues, but this service has only been raised once during our meeting.

I wanted to get your thoughts on that.

● (1240)

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** I think that service in the form of employee assistance programs would be very helpful to victims of sexual harassment. I would want to make sure individuals within that system have been trained on the issue of sexual harassment, because while it seems on the one hand everybody understands what sexual harassment is, there is actually a lot of misunderstanding about it in terms of the impact it has and the ways in which a woman has chosen to cope. For example, you frequently will hear stories of women who have tolerated it for years and then they end up being blamed. Why did they put up with that for so long? Why didn't they complain immediately? Well, we know there are reasons that women don't complain.

Whatever counsellors you provide to targets, they need to have some training. They need to have some understanding of sexual harassment. They need to have an understanding about the broader issue of violence against women, because certainly sexual harassment falls within that realm.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** What would you say are the benefits of offering access to supports such as counselling services to individuals engaged in reporting, or a mediation process for sexual harassment in the workplace?

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** There are individual benefits, obviously. If a person has someone to talk to, someone to process her feelings with.... I'm a psychologist, so of course I believe that talking about one's experiences, especially those that are stressful, can have important beneficial consequences.

It also benefits the organization. In an organization, you want your employees to be healthy, both psychologically and physically. It makes sense to provide this kind of intervention for your own employees so that they can recover and come back full strength. It communicates to other women in the organization that you're taking this matter seriously. We know that's one of the factors of organizational climate. Does the organization take it seriously? When you provide benefits in the form of counselling to targets, you're communicating that to them.

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

You were talking about sanctions with my colleague Madam Bateman. Could you elaborate a bit on the sanctions in the military? You finished off there, and you said you were going to send something. Could you discuss what sanctions there are in your military to which you were referring?

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** Again, depending on the offence.... Obviously, it goes up to court martial, which would involve prison incarceration, certainly dismissal from the military, but also there is demotion in rank, being suspended from duties, not being allowed to.... For example, you would be prohibited from working with female recruits.

In the United States we certainly have our own scandals in the military. I don't know if you saw on the news that the person in charge of assisting women who have been sexually assaulted in our military was recently arrested for groping a woman. So we are not immune to this problem of people in charge not fulfilling their responsibilities. So—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Collinsworth. Once again, I need to interrupt you. The time is over.

[Translation]

Ms. Hughes, or Mr. Choquette, rather, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. François Choquette:** I am going to let Marc-André Morin go first.

● (1245)

**Mr. Marc-André Morin:** I'll try to keep it brief.



Your research has allowed you to draw conclusions on harassment in hierarchically structured workplaces. In your view, women who work in those settings are more likely to experience sexual harassment than those who work in a regular environment. Doesn't the inherent nature of a hierarchical organization lead to abuse of authority? Couldn't that potentially give rise to assaults?

In the same vein, do you think it's possible to solve this kind of problem from inside a hierarchical organization? There's the possibility of those in charge punishing the victims, because they are farther down the hierarchical structure.

What do you think?

[English]

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** That was a multi-point question, so I'll try to answer all of them. If I leave one out, let me know.

I think the first question was on how to address it. I had started to explain it. If you look again at the model in terms of job gender context, job gender context predicts harassment. When the job gender context is skewed in the direction of males, then there is more harassment. The context includes the number of males compared to the number of women in the workplace.

For example, in jobs that tend to be male dominated, such as construction, the military, and policing, those sorts of traditionally male occupations where there are more men than women, that leads to more harassment. You're absolutely right. If you're a woman working in a context in which there are more men than women, then harassment is more likely to occur.

It also is more likely to occur if you work in a workplace where there are more male supervisors. If there are female supervisors, that kind of gender parity tends to reduce the harassment. You need leaders who are women, and you also need to have a more balanced job gender context.

For the second part of your question on how we can fix this if there is this hierarchical structure, I would again refer you to Dr. John Pryor. He looked at the issue of how it is that harassment occurs in an organization, and from the offender's perspective. He found that some men will never harass, regardless of whether or not they have power over a woman. They're low in the likelihood to sexually harass. There are some men who are high in the likelihood to sexually harass.

You can't give employees a test to find out who's high and who's low, because we'd get into profiling. The good news is that when you have management norms, where the managers are modelling no harassment—

**The Chair:** One more minute, Madam Collinsworth.

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** —when you have sanctions against them, even men who are high in likelihood to sexually harass will not do it. So it is the organization's responsibility, and they have the power to do this, to change things in the environment, to model for their male employees how one should treat their co-workers or their subordinates. When you do that, you will move in the direction of decreasing sexual harassment.

I do not believe that simply because there is a hierarchical structure we must automatically accept that sexual harassment is going to occur. The research indicates clearly that is not correct.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Time has expired.

Madam Crockatt, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** Thank you very much, Dr. Collinsworth, for being with us today to share your wealth of experience and knowledge. We really appreciate it.

I'm going to try to drill down a little bit, but before I do that, I want to go back to something. One of my colleagues across the way may have left a different impression about the legislation we have coming forward that involves the RCMP.

I think I heard you say that at the corporate level they get it, that it is a very important thing with change, so that organizations are dealing appropriately with sexual harassment. In answering the question of whether the organization takes it seriously, you said leadership is a really important issue. You expressed some concern about whether that meant one person at the top making a snap decision to fire someone, or whatever.

I wanted to give a bit more information about the RCMP in Canada. We've heard directly from their commissioner that they've hired harassment advisers. They have electronic reporting forms as well as personal reporting. There are multiple methods for reporting, including formal and informal. They have a code of conduct. They've implemented a zero tolerance policy. All complaints are investigated. Early reporting is encouraged. They have penalties ranging from demotion right up....

What would you think about that kind of process now that you know a little bit more about it?

• (1250)

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** I think it sounds like an excellent process. I do see problems in assuming that will address everything. As I said, this is just my experience, because of some litigation in which I served as an expert witness, that when you look at a corporation's policy and you look at their procedures, they frequently at this stage, finally, over multiple decades, seem to have gotten it at the corporate level to put into place procedures so that there is some sort of mechanism in place for women to complain.

The problem is down on the ground where the plants and the individual offices are around the country. It doesn't seem to filter down to them. They need training.

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** I was just going to go there. How would you suggest you look at your systems to make sure that message does filter down? Can you give us some concise tips on what your research has shown?

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** Certainly training is needed at all levels. Certainly supervisors need to be trained. In the United States and our tort claims, if a supervisor is doing the harassing, there's greater liability than if it's a co-worker who is doing it, because supervisors represent the company. They represent the corporation with power and authority and that sort of thing. Certainly supervisors need to be trained about sexual harassment, and they need to be trained to take it seriously.

I have heard about lots of training in which joking goes on and people laugh at the experiences women have had. It's that kind of an atmosphere that you cannot tolerate because it communicates that you aren't really taking it seriously. You have everything in place, but you really don't take it seriously.

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** This is key and very important. We've talked a lot about training, but none of our witnesses so far was able to accurately measure the relationship between the training and the incidence of harassment. Do you have any research? Is there anyway to measure that?

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** Yes, I know there is. I will make a note to find something that shows effective training and send it to you. At the same time I will reiterate that sanctions against offenders are most effective in decreasing harassment.

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** That's wonderful. Thank you. I would really appreciate your information on training.

Do I have time for a brief question?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Ms. Joan Crockatt:** Do you have any research on whether electronic or distance reporting was any more or less important than reporting in person? Is it important? Which would you suggest is the most effective way of reporting so that people who are victimized have the best opportunity?

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** It pretty much depends.... I don't know of any research that has been done on it, but it's very interesting.

• (1255)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Collinsworth. Sorry about that, but the time has expired.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Choquette, the last word goes to you. You have five minutes.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Collinsworth, thank you kindly for your participation today.

I want to pick up on what my colleague Mr. Morin was saying regarding the challenge of making it easier for women to freely report their harasser. The witness who appeared before you said that many victims of sexual harassment at the RCMP were afraid to talk or complain.

In very large organizations with hierarchical structures, like the RCMP, it can be difficult to confide in someone without fear of reprisal. Perhaps some of those fears are imagined, but as you mentioned, there are genuine concerns in male-dominated workforces.

One solution that's been proposed to the committee is the creation of an independent oversight board. Victims could go to the board to report their harasser and describe what they've experienced without fearing reprisal from their superiors or worrying about losing their job.

What are your thoughts on that?

[*English*]

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** Perhaps in an ideal world that might be a good solution. The problem is that you cannot discipline an employee for an infraction if he does not know of what he is accused, so the identity of the individual who has reported can rarely be kept confidential.

I just don't know how it would work. We've thought about that. We've tried to think about how these things can get reported, but in terms of disciplining an employee for an infraction, they have to know who has accused them and what they've been accused of. How can they defend themselves if they don't know what the accusations are?

I don't know, maybe I've misunderstood your question.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Choquette:** I fully understand what you're saying, but that's not quite what I was getting at. I didn't mean a place where people could make confidential reports. What I meant was an independent board that would take complaints in cases where the individual didn't want to report the behaviour to a superior. The board would then decide on the consequences. Earlier we talked about suspensions and other possible forms of discipline.

It's just an idea. It's not easy to explain in the short time we have. Basically, the board would conduct investigations. As things stand, the RCMP has a long history of problems across the entire organization, throughout the ranks. This approach would address the problem externally, from outside the RCMP structure, in order to deal with the real issue. At any rate, it's one suggestion.

I would also like to talk to you about your article, "In Harm's Way: Factors Related to Psychological Distress Following Sexual Harassment". You did a lot of work on the myths surrounding rape. Could you briefly explain to us how, through your research, you were able to come to the conclusion that we need to work on dispelling those myths?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have a bit less than a minute, Madam Collinsworth, so a short answer, please.

**Prof. Linda Collinsworth:** I'm going to go back very briefly to your previous question and make a suggestion, if this is not already in place.

Women who have been sexually harassed and are afraid to report need to have multiple means to do so. If they're in a hierarchical organization where you're supposed to report to your superior officer anything that has happened, that is going to discourage women from complaining, so there needs to be multiple avenues. A person could use a hotline, or go to a superior officer, or go over that officer's head to somebody else. There needs to be multiple paths for a woman to complain.

•(1300)

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Collinsworth. I'm sorry but I need to stop you here. On behalf of the committee, I thank you very much for appearing before us.

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