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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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• (1630)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): Good afternoon. We are very excited today to continue our study of violence against young women and girls.

We have a number of guests with us today. We were to have a video conference with East Prince Women's Information Centre. We have Andy Lou Somers, who is the executive director, and Nancy Beth Guptill, a cyber-violence expert. They don't have video conference working, so we're going to have them on cellphone with a limited battery. No pressure. We'll let them go first for their 10 minutes.

Then, from the CYCC Network we have Lisa Lachance, who is the executive director, and Alicia Raimundo, youth advisory committee co-chair. After we hear from the ladies from East Prince, we will go over to CYCC for 10 minutes.

Andy, welcome, and go ahead for 10 minutes.

Ms. Andy Lou Somers (Executive Director, East Prince Women's Information Centre): I am just doing the intro, and then Nancy Beth is taking over and doing the rest.

My name is Andy Lou Somers, and I'm the executive director of East Prince Women's Information Centre in Summerside, Prince Edward Island. We are a resource and referral centre that works with women and girls in the central to western part of the province. We do programming that increases women's economic security and community workshops and programs that help girls and women to live healthy lifestyles.

I'm also a mother of six children and a grandmother of nine. I've learned the hard way that living on a small island that is fairly removed from the hustle and bustle of urban areas does not mean that we are not vulnerable, especially when it comes to cyber-violence. I'm beginning to think today that maybe it would be better if we were in an urban area, given the problems that we've had with this.

For the past five years we've been working with schools, youth groups, and service providers doing workshops on social media safety. Doing these workshops opened us up to a new world of scary things happening to our girls in cyberspace. It's terrifying to hear local stories, but the presentations we did opened the door for discussion.

Many of the young girls who heard our workshops and presentations felt safe and trusted us, telling us their stories of what

they were experiencing or had experienced. What was shocking was to find out that no one, and I mean no one, seemed to know where to go for help, who to ask for help, or who could do anything about what was happening. There are no school policies or laws in the province regarding cyber-violence.

Many of the girls told us they would never tell their parents things that were happening to them because they were embarrassed and they feared that they would have their phones and computers taken from them. School counsellors and service providers have told us that they had no idea how to help in situations regarding any type of safety on the Internet as they're not trained or educated in how to do that.

Girls and young women were being targeted, and we just thought, how are we ever going to help? It was almost as if Status of Women Canada had read our minds, because they put a call out for proposals on eliminating and preventing cyber-violence against young women and girls, and we were successful in receiving funding to do that. Our project consisted of doing a needs assessment and bringing community partners together to work on a strategy and move that forward.

Nancy Beth Guptill did all the work on the needs assessment, so I'm passing it over to her.

• (1635)

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill (Cyberviolence Expert, East Prince Women's Information Centre): Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity for us to share some of our findings of the needs assessment for Prince Edward Island.

In terms of cyber-violence in P.E.I., the findings were very startling to say the least, with youth reporting very high incidences of online violence which, for the most part, they are left to navigate and handle on their own. We found that 79% of youth said that they were victims of cyber-violence and 100% said that they had witnessed acts of cyber-violence and cybersexual violence, with 86% reporting they have unrestricted access to the Internet, social media sites and mobile applications.

Youth are experiencing mild to extreme forms of online violence, all of which are violations of and assaults against them. Unfortunately, online violence has become normalized, as youth believe everyone is abused at one point or another, and that cyber-violence comes with the territory of using the Internet and mobile devices.

Our research clearly indicates that female and male youth are equal victims of cyber-violence, with the exception of cybersexual violence, which is distinct gender violence against women and girls. Without a doubt, cybersexual violence and technology-related violence against women and girls exist in Prince Edward Island. The research reveals that girls are the primary victims of cybersexual violence and are under extreme pressure to share sexual images of themselves with young males their age, as well as with older males from their communities and male strangers they meet online.

Approximately 25% of the female youth said they were victims of cybersexual violence. Their experiences included being inappropriately propositioned for sex, asked to share nude photos or enter into an inappropriate sexual conversation, sexual harassment, sexual bullying, sexual blackmail, sexual exploitation, and more.

None of the male youth reported being a victim of cybersexual violence, while approximately 70% of all youth said they had been a witness to cybersexual violence. Forty-eight per cent of stakeholders reported responding to and supporting youth victims of cyber-violence, with 75% of incidents involving some form of cybersexual violence.

In our five years of doing outreach presentations and two years of intense research, we did not uncover one male victim of cybersexual violence in Prince Edward Island. That is not to say there are no male victims; however, in engaging with over 4,500 people that included youth, parents, interested adults and community stakeholders, we only uncovered female victims of cybersexual violence.

There's an uncomfortable conversation that needs to be had around the new language used by male and female youth to describe male youth who sexually exploit female students. An overwhelming 95% of youth who participated in our research study said girls are definitely more sexually violated, usually by the "eff-boys", a popular term used to describe the male youth who are at the top of the food chain. I'll leave it to your imagination what "eff-boys" stands for.

During our research phase, 46% of youth discussed this food chain, which is a pecking order that exists within the public school system, ranging from the preps to greasers—that's their language and not ours. It is the preps who commit most acts of cyber-violence and cybersexual violence according to youth, including those youth who self-identify as preps. Acts of social oppression are done to assert their position of dominance and influence, with the purpose of intimidating others so they do not become the victims, but rather are looked up to and feared by their peers.

Youth describe "eff-boys" as male students at the top of this food chain. They're characterized as the male preps who are top-tier athletes, come from rich families, are favoured by teachers, are spoiled by parents, and are entitled. They are further characterized by female youth as being oversexed males who are disrespectful towards women and girls, and pressure females into sexual conversations, sexual encounters, and sending sexts. They have no boundaries and no limits, speak very degradingly of women and girls, and treat women within their own families very poorly. They tend to feed their "eff-boy" tendencies by pressuring girls for nudes and sex.

Once they receive the nude, they then blackmail girls to obtain more images, to have sex with them and their friends, and to hang out with them at parties. The consequence of not obliging is a threat of releasing and sharing the nudes with the entire school population and character assassination.

● (1640)

These men have locked photo albums on their phones with hundreds of nude and near-nude images of female classmates. They're viewing and swapping these images on their way to school, at lunch hour, and on breaks.

Some of the "eff-boys" terrorize other male students who do not pressure girls for nudes. They call them names and spread derogatory sexual rumours about them. Many youth feel pressured to sit in and want to avoid being abused themselves. They feel like they have to participate in sexting and pressuring girls for nudes, otherwise they'll be sexually harassed by being labelled a fag or a pussy.

A few male youths said they lost friendships and social networks because they would not participate in pressuring girls for nudes, and for telling male classmates to stop sending them images of naked female classmates. These young men left sexually aggressive male social networks because they were abused so badly by classmates. Additionally, they did not want to be associated with this type of sexually aggressive behaviour. According to them, if you're associated with the "eff-boys", you're stereotyped to be one whether you are one or not.

Youth have a lot to share on this topic, and often the conversation returned to the subject of sexual exploitation of girls and the pressure that both male and female students are under to participate. It was very evident to us that youth are struggling with how to manage and navigate this new phenomenon that is a very real problem for both genders.

Another uncomfortable conversation that we need to have centres around many female students proactively participating in porn culture. They are willing to produce and distribute intimate photos of themselves for control and popularity. There are girls who have text and email distribution lists of fellow male classmates, and they send out nude pictures of themselves on certain days—

The Chair: I'm really sorry, you're at the end of your time.

If you could just quickly wrap up, I'll give you another 20 seconds.

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: Okay.

What we discovered in the research, then, is that ultimately for best practices, there is a yearning for more education and public awareness. The youth are desperately looking for strategies and adult mentorship in how to deal with cyber-violence themselves.

The Chair: Excellent.

Thanks very much.

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: We're not in an ideal situation here.

The Chair: I really appreciate your participating and working with us through the cellphone stuff. You came through great.

We're going now to the CYCC Network with Lisa Lachance.

You can begin your 10 minutes that you're sharing with Alicia.

Ms. Lisa Lachance (Executive Director, CYCC Network): Great. Thank you so much.

Honourable members, fellow presenters, and parliamentary staff, thank you so much for welcoming us today. On behalf of the Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts Network, we'd like to highlight the particular challenges faced by vulnerable young women in Canada with regard to facing violence, cyber-violence, and supporting their mental health, and also illustrate the realities faced by informal community-based services that are often on the front lines of providing services to marginalized young women.

With regard to the CYCC Network, we're a knowledge mobilization network funded through the federal government through the Networks of Centres of Excellence. We're based at Dalhousie University in Halifax. We focus on finding the best practices to support the mental health and well-being of the most vulnerable young people. We connect researchers, service providers, policy officials, and young people themselves in conversations about what works, and we promote the increased use of evidence and evaluation in the sector.

We are concerned about young people who have complex needs that span multiple service providers, such as special education, mental health services, juvenile detention, child welfare, and others. We have had a particular focus on girls and boys, young women and men who have been exposed to violence or who perpetuate violence. We approach our work with a strong commitment to youth engagement as a philosophy, a principle, and a series of concrete actions. We also seek to support the positive uses of technology in young people's lives.

I'd like to start by highlighting a few of the promising practices we consider important for the discussion today. When we looked at the mental health help-seeking behaviour of vulnerable young people, we recognized the role of stigma and self-stigma that often prevents young people from seeking mental health help. Young women experiencing cyber-violence would be at risk for increased feelings of stigma because of the pressure to be active online, as well as the disconnect from this youth reality and—

• (1645)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, I think the interpreters are having a problem.

The Chair: They're having trouble with your mike. They're wondering if there's a cellphone close to it or anything.

Ms. Lisa Lachance: I actually don't have mine on me.

The Chair: You can change the mike, and it might help.

Ms. Lisa Lachance: Just to summarize the last point, we looked at how vulnerable young people seek help for their mental health. Really, stigma and self-stigma continue to be strong barriers. We feel that young women exposed to or experiencing cyber-violence would

have increased feelings of self-stigma and stigma in terms of seeking help for that issue.

We're just beginning to understand the experience and effects of cyber-violence. Mental health professionals, however, are coming face to face with the effects of this in their work with young people. To make sure clinical practice is rooted in each experience, there should be support for researchers and professional bodies to continue to develop their understanding of the clinical implications of cyber-violence, and to develop practice guidelines regarding this issue.

Young women who have experienced violence and cyber-violence need access to both evidence-based debriefing techniques as well as ongoing therapy, but they rarely have access to what they need. There is an urgent need for access to mental health services for all Canadians in a mental health crisis. This is a story that anyone can tell if they've tried to access mental health services.

Public services are limited, wait times are extraordinary, and private services are expensive and limited as well. For vulnerable young people, mending without a primary consistent caregiver, the challenge of accessing services often means going without.

I'm a mental health advocate, and I've also worked for decades in government at the provincial and federal levels.

I'm also the parent of a child with significant mental health needs, and I fight every day of the week to access the services that he needs. I often wonder what happens to young people who don't have that person who can play that role in their life. That's the case for many of the people we think of in our network, so we can all imagine that they slip through the cracks. They're not getting the mental health services they need.

We also want to highlight to the committee the challenge to think beyond schools for education about cyber-bullying and violence. The participants before us also spoke to that need as well. For many young people, school-based education and programs are a great start. They will reach the majority of young people, and we would emphasize they need to be youth-led to be most effective.

For vulnerable young people, they often have a tenuous connection to the formal health school system or aren't in school at all, so community-based services play a more crucial role in their lives. They provide everything from shelter, food, housing, to programs like drop-in support, peer support, and art and recreation therapies. Imagine what you would need to know, or how you would react if you have 15 minutes with a young person at a drop-in group setting. There's no guarantee they're coming back the next day or the next week, and they disclose their experiences with cyber-violence to you.

How can you respond? How can you respond in a way that supports a young person and their mental health, but at the same time against a backdrop of the young person being concerned about housing, food, access to employment, and access to education?

This is what we ask the youth workers to do on a daily basis. Youth workers often have a privileged and trusted position with vulnerable young people, and will receive disclosures of violence and cyber-violence, but often have little recourse to respond or don't know how to respond. At the same time, organizations that provide those types of services often have their own policies that would penalize young people if they were found to be perpetrators of cyber-violence. Obviously, what would work better in the first place would be to prevent cyber-violence for these types of situations.

We had a look with our members in terms of what types of programs they offer in terms of prevention in addressing cyber-violence. Although we haven't been able to do an exhaustive review, it seems that most of the time it's on an ad-hoc basis, so most organizations don't have their own in-house programs, and they seek the support of other organizations who have programs and bring them in.

As we think about this issue in Canada, we need to think about how to address the most vulnerable young people where they're at, which is often with community-based services, and how we can support community organizations to have the resources they need to address the issue.

We aren't justice experts, but we would like to raise some of our concerns in conversations around sanctioning unacceptable sexual online behaviour. Some cyber-bullying and violence policies have the potential to drive the behaviour underground. The previous participants noted that youth are reluctant to or won't report problems, because they feel they've been in violation of a cyber-bullying or cyber-violence policy, or their concerned about losing their access online.

We're also concerned about vulnerable young people, such as racialized young people, and their connection with the education and justice system.

A final plea is from our researchers in our network for adequate funding to continue to gather information about this trend, so that we can respond with appropriate policies and programs.

I'd like to turn it to Alicia now.

• (1650)

Miss Alicia Raimundo (Youth Advisory Committee Co-Chair, Youth Advisory Committee, CYCC Network): I am a youth mental health advocate, and I try to make my change in mental health through the tech system.

I want to tell you my story. As a young kid, after I tried to take my own life, I received the majority of my support online. I didn't have trusted adults in my community who I felt I could talk to. I'm not alone. Kids Help Phone did a study that said 55% of suicidal young people are reaching out for support online and through social media.

When you consider that many of the evidence-based online services have really restricted hours or are not connecting to peer support, and young people are usually in unrestricted, unsupportive

environments, you can see where cyber-violence might come into this.

As a young person, I have experienced cyber-violence myself. In one case, a single tweet led to 1,000 angry responses, including 100 death threats and three attempts to "dox" me. Doxing is the practice of releasing online the personal information on someone, including pictures, social insurance number, and home address, because you don't like what the person said. The attacks are commonly used online against women for opposing sexism, for turning down sexual advances, or for simply being women. In one case, a man used this information to drive to my friend's house with guns in the back of his car. He crashed his car and was stopped. Even after this, the best advice the police could give to this woman was to get off the Internet.

For many, living a life without social media would isolate them and affect their business and job prospects. Suggesting to someone that they should leave the Internet is punishing the victim and rewarding the perpetrator. Young women do not find the current laws and police helpful in these cases. The only suggestion was for them to leave the Internet, so they've been advocating directly with social media sites and have created their own protection networks and peer support groups for those who've been attacked online.

Many women experience cyber-violence beyond sexual violence, including the loss of their jobs as their attackers are relentless in calling their workplaces, tweeting, and showing up to get the person fired. In my case, my whole online history of posts was mailed to my employer, because I rejected someone's advances.

Cyber-violence prevention programs and education are often focused on what women and girls can do to protect themselves. This is not enough. We need to educate the boys and men to stop thinking that this kind of violence is just a funny joke. This is not a game. We need programs and campaigns aimed at men and boys instead of at women.

As in my case, when you're able to sit down with someone who is trying to troll you online and show them that you're a person, it can make a world of difference.

The Chair: That was excellent. Thank you very much.

We're going to begin our seven-minute rounds of questioning, starting with Mr. Fraser, my Liberal colleague.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): I'm pleased to see that we have some east coast representation. I'm from Nova Scotia. I'm a Dalhousie graduate, and I spent a few summers at the College of Piping in Summerside as well. Thanks very much for being here and for your evidence.

I'll start with East Prince Women's Information Centre. Right now, I'm hearing lots of evidence that is similar to what we've heard in previous testimony about indicating that there are problems.

I'm curious about what you see, particularly in the context of a small community. Has your program led to any sort of new solutions? You discussed a need for education. Have you seen, for example, a reduction in cyber-violence or violence against women or extended support for survivors of cyber-violence as a result of your programming?

• (1655)

Ms. Andy Lou Somers: We've found that especially girls are more comfortable coming to someone to get help, whereas before, they were too fearful or embarrassed to do it.

It's hard to judge whether it has helped much, because there seem to be a lot more coming forward. It's just a question of where we can find the solutions to help them get through their problems, because there's really been nothing done since we started this project. We've discovered that there are absolutely no policies in the schools, and the police are telling us they need more nuts and bolts. We've met with the ministers of justice, and they're not doing anything about it until they see, for instance, what new policies Nova Scotia is going to put in place.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Do the participants report to you guys that the program has helped them as they've struggled through the experiences they've had?

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: We can report to you that we get quite a number of phone calls from the schools or other youth-serving organizations when they're facing some form of cyber-violence. It tends to be some form of cybersexual violence against a young female. They bring in an outside expert to address the youth. It's usually me who goes in. They find that after we go in and do the presentation, yes, they are seeing the situation being corrected.

As an example of that, we had a girl in grade 6 who was questioning her sexuality. On Instagram about four or five accounts popped up that were slandering her and causing a lot of damage. We were brought in to talk about digital leadership, digital literacy, and the importance of being a good cyber-citizen. All the accounts were shut down after that. The youth was able to recover her reputation and go on and do well.

Mr. Sean Fraser: So at the very least, there's some great anecdotal evidence from the perspective of victims.

Shifting gears, I was particularly interested, Ms. Raimundo, in your mention at the end of your comments that we need to launch campaigns to educate men and boys to be part of the solution. I think everybody we've spoken with who has considered this realizes that this is not just a woman's problem, that this is society's problem, and everybody needs to take part.

Do you have any suggestions, either of you, on how a campaign would be most effectively designed?

Miss Alicia Raimundo: I think this is one of those cases where a lot of the guys who will kind of get into the groupthink that it's hilarious to harass these women need to be connected, face to face, I think, with some of the women who've been victims of these things in order to see the real harm they're causing. When it's a username

and a picture and you don't actually know the person you're causing harm to, it can be really easy to forget that you're causing that harm.

There are some really touching stories of that. One young woman's troll was pretending to be her deceased father online. She called him and talked to him. I think the crushing reality of what he was doing hit him.

That's one example of what to do in more and more cases—to show that it's not funny, that it's not a game.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Do you have anything to add, Ms. Lachance?

Ms. Lisa Lachance: I think the main point I would add is that one of the things I've learned through this network and through working with Alicia and other mental health advocates is the need for youth to be leading a lot of these initiatives and to be part of the creation. If I have learned anything, it's that although I consider myself quite astute online, I actually can't keep up with where young people are. We need to co-create with young people.

I think that where it's going to happen is going to keep on changing. We need to have young people involved in everything from prevention to helping schools talk about what the appropriate responses would be in their school community. I think it also serves to empower young people to take back the issue themselves.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I think I have about a minute left, so first I'll go back to East Prince, and then I'll open this up to both of you.

It seems the importance of the initiatives being community-led can't be overstated. Is it that the needs are so local? Is that why we need to be focusing on community-based initiatives rather than on a grand strategy from Ottawa?

Ms. Andy Lou Somers: Yes. I believe with this kind of issue you need to have the community-based groups dealing with them on the ground level.

• (1700)

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay.

Do you guys have anything to add before we wrap up?

Miss Alicia Raimundo: I would just encourage you to also think of the Internet as a community. While in some communities there are those being harassed face to face, by people who know them, there have also been large harassment campaigns where they actually don't know the women and have never met them. They're hacking their phones and releasing documents, never even having met these people. I was doxed by someone who doesn't even live in the same city as me and has never met me.

I would really consider working with the social media sites to ban more of these individuals in a faster manner and figure out a better solution, because you can ban one account and three more are operating the next day. I would say that for the communities where the youth are harassing each other and they know each other in person, it's important, but that's not always the case.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, those are my questions.

The Chair: Excellent.

We'll go to Mr. Genuis for seven minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you very much for all the presentations.

I was thinking a little bit about this whole question of education. C.S. Lewis said that education without values is about as useful as making people into clever devils. You were talking about education. What are the limits of education in terms of helping people learn empathy? Some of you suggested that you thought that was effective in some cases, but obviously in some cases the problem isn't a lack of information or a lack of understanding, it's just people not caring enough about the other person's response.

I'd be curious to hear everyone's reaction to that.

Ms. Lisa Lachance: Alicia and I were talking a bit about the fact that we are all learning how to be online together. There's a whole spectrum of behaviour online that ranges from hopefully appropriate to degrees of inappropriateness. People's interactions with each other are often not appropriate, and there is a line where it becomes violence and requires a different response. With that in mind, I think prevention education programs in schools or community organizations could target the creation of greater feelings of empathy.

There are two caveats I would put in there. First, we want to ensure that we're promoting healthy relationships and that anti-bullying and cyber-violence programs are evidence-based. There are a lot of social-emotional learning programs out there, but very few of them have a strong evidence base. This is a plea for evidence-based programs. Second, we need to think about when those aren't going to work and what the appropriate sanctions are, because there are times when the behaviour won't be changed by those types of programs.

Miss Alicia Raimundo: I think it is really looking at what the laws look like in this space for this new age. The things that were said to me, if someone had said them in person, the cops would not think twice about arresting him. Somehow, putting it on an online space made them perceive it as less real, but the fear was real for me. I changed my number and I moved. We should realize that we need to consider what this is like. I had a friend who was trying to press charges against her online harasser, but he was using every court date as another way to harass her. In the end, she had to drop the charges and change her name. I think we really need to consider what the harassment laws look like in a space like this.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The message is that the education piece is important, but there are certain individuals and certain cases where it goes beyond that.

I want to talk about the criminal law and how it enters into this. We use different words: harassment, cyber-violence, bullying. At the end of the day, we're talking about highly criminal activity.

To start with the folks on the phone, could you share a little bit about what the response was from the police in the cases you looked at? If people are sharing nude photos of minors online, that's obviously a very serious criminal offence. What has the response been? Does there need to be a stronger response from law enforcement? Is that part of the problem?

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: Is that being directed to East Prince Women's Information Centre?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, maybe they could start and then I could come back to the others.

• (1705)

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: In speaking with police and with school officials, we have found that there is definitely a gap within the policies and legislation. When you look at it, you wonder whether the activity is truly criminal and if it reaches that level of requirement. That's where the issue becomes a problem.

In March 2015, it could be that people were not aware of the new cyber-bullying laws that are out. We feel there needs to be a full review at the provincial level, with people reviewing the new legislation and seeing how it applies, particularly within the school system. We're finding that if something happens and the school is left to deal with it, quite often this happens on the school grounds and they're not calling in the police. There are no set policies within the public education system. They're left to deal with it on their own. It's only in extreme cases where the police are called in. Then they have to make sure that it's meeting the Criminal Code. What they're telling us is, in a lot of cases, while there is severe harm being caused, it's not within the definition of a Criminal Code offence. They're not able to hold the people accountable. The youth themselves are saying we need new legislation to fill these gaps so that people can be held accountable provincially and federally.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Could I just clarify that? I'm trying to understand what you're saying. Obviously, there would be some cases that would fall into a legal grey area or where new legislation is needed. A lot of the cases you talked about, somebody sharing or threatening to share a nude photo of a fellow minor, are clearly illegal. Surely the issue there is more one of enforcement than it is of law. Maybe you could clarify that. Maybe I'm not understanding.

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: Sure. Here's an example. At school we met with different guidance counsellors who are actually counselling girls who are found in this situation. What ends up happening is the girl comes in and shares her experience. You would think that the guidance counsellor would immediately bring in the police or engage the principal. Sometimes, they'll let the youth decide where they want to go with it. If the youth says, "Please don't engage my parents; I don't want to tell the police," then they feel that because there's no policy or protocols in place they don't want to break the trust of the girl, so they're there to counsel and help the girl through what she's dealing with.

The Chair: That's your time.

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

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thanks to all four of you so much for your work. It's very powerful, and you're able to transmit it to us well.

To the women from East Prince, you were talking at the beginning about the grant that you received at the perfect time to do this project and scope out needs and demands in your area. That was in 2014, right?

Ms. Andy Lou Somers: Yes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'm curious. What happens next? How badly do you need operational funding and that predictable ongoing multi-year funding as opposed to the peak-of-the-project-oriented funding?

Ms. Andy Lou Somers: We need funding badly. It was great to get the project because we had done all the workshops on little grants through our provincial women's secretariat, which showed us there needed to be a lot more work done. We were grateful when the call for proposals came out from Status of Women and it fit right in with the work we had been doing. But now that we're just ending it this fall—it ends in December—and we have all these things that need to be done, how is that going to happen? Yes, we need to keep working on it and keep bringing all these issues forward, but at this point we haven't received any funding to do that.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Were you able to get to the point of developing the strategy as well as doing the needs assessment?

Ms. Andy Lou Somers: Yes, we developed strategies from the needs assessment, based on the recommendations we heard from the community consultations and focus groups and online surveys. We reached over 5,000 people ultimately, and got a lot of good feedback. Now we're really eager to keep it going and we're seeking funders to help us.

• (1710)

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: If I might add, part of what we did was we went back out to the community stakeholders and we shared the strategy with them. For instance, we just met with three provincial ministers who are very interested in the work we're doing. Now it becomes a matter of who has the money to carry this forward.

Ms. Andy Lou Somers: We're non-profit and we do not receive any core funding. All the money that we use to operate, and we're fully operational, we raise ourselves.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thanks.

I'm going to switch to CYCC now.

I'm interested in your work around the mental health fallout of online bullying and what your experience is as a network that touches a lot of different organizations around whether women across the country have equal access to the kind of mental health support that they need.

Ms. Lisa Lachance: I don't have exact stats in terms of women who identify that they've experienced cyber-violence and their access to mental health services. In general, I would say that young people don't have access to the mental health support they need. It doesn't matter whether you're in a large urban centre or in a rural area in Canada, access to services remains a huge issue. In many cases, young people, especially under the age of 18, might not know how to access services. They might not think they can access services without their parents' knowledge.

If I can just jump back to the previous member's questions around police, justice, and schools maybe not responding to experiences of

cyber-violence, I just don't think we should be surprised. A woman reporting an actual physical sexual assault is often called to account for her behaviour. In these cases, young women may also feel that they've broken certain rules or laws by sending nudes under enormous pressure or in whatever context.

I think that also will prevent young women from seeking support because in their head they can do their own analysis of, "I did something wrong too, and now this is what I'm getting." In society that's the message people give: "That's your fault; you engaged in this."

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I only have a couple of minutes, so I'll just ask another question to both of the organizations.

For the best practices, or the good outcomes that you've developed within your own communities or within your own organization, how much hope do you have around being able to share those practices and use those networks in order to have the good outcomes and the good strategies that you have developed, and be able to telegraph those out? What's your capacity to share that information and have everybody benefit from what you've learned?

Ms. Lisa Lachance: I can start. We will benefit from core funding for two and a half more years, which has allowed us to build an online site where organizations can go and figure out how they might increase the use of evidence or the use of evaluation in their work and in their services. That is an extremely privileged position in the child and youth services sector. This is a sector that is constantly trying to figure out how to do the next month, the next year, and the next project.

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: In Atlantic Canada, we started meeting with the other maritime provinces to work together in sharing our strategies and findings. Our goal is to find a regional strategy and approach, pool resources, and come together. We just started initial conversations that way.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Good for you. That's going to be valuable for everybody.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: All right.

We'll go to Ms. Vandenberg, for seven minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): I want to thank all of you for being here.

I'd like to pick up on the mental health issue again, because I'm quite struck by Alicia and her comment that the fear is just as real. The mental health implications are just as real, and yet there is a perception that the virtual world is not as real, and so there is an impact on mental health, but also the ability to seek help.

I noticed that you had said 55% of young people reach out online, and in the background documents there were some indications of ways in which the support and the help can also be provided online. If we're talking about things like real-time crisis intervention through Skype, and through technology or peer support, can you tell us a bit about what can be done and what is being done, and if there is a role for the federal government with funding, with projects, or even in legislation?

• (1715)

Miss Alicia Raimundo: One of the things that I hope for would be to have the formalized online peer support and online counselling offered more regularly in the hours that this happens to young people. You could be waking up in the middle of the night to 40 tweets telling you that you're ugly and that you should die. We need more services that would be able to respond to those needs, so that you know you're going to go to someone who is accountable for what they say to you.

The other thing I would add is that I had a very good friend who was in and out of the hospital for abuse she was receiving on Instagram and Twitter. Every time she'd go in the hospital they'd take her phone away. Of course she is going to get better if her phone is not there, and so they weren't addressing the issue. Then she would get back out, see what everyone was saying about her, and then go back in. It was a merciless cycle.

I would encourage more evidence-based and better services to be available online. There's an organization out of the United States where young women who have been harassed can get online support from other young women who have been harassed online. I found it really helpful, and so did a lot of my friends, just to be with people who know what it's like to be hit with a constant barrage of seeing awful things about yourself everywhere.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I heard you when you said, and others have said, that the solution was to just go offline. That reminds me of when women were told to just don't go out onto the streets, then. This is space where women have a right to be. I'm quite concerned that what we're hearing is that there isn't awareness of legislation. There's no awareness that it's illegal to send an intimate image to a third person.

This is also for the East Prince Women's Information Centre. I believe you said there are gaps in the legislation. We're hearing two things in the committee right now. We're hearing that the legislation that exists is not being enforced, that some police are not aware of it, and that a lot of young people are not aware of it. I'm interested to hear about the gaps in the legislation, as well, if there is a need to legislate further, particularly with regard to the Criminal Code and what the thresholds are for criminal harassment.

I'll put that to the East Prince Women's Information Centre first and then see what you think.

Ms. Andy Lou Somers: I know from speaking with our justice minister that there's not really any legislation in place right now, and they are not going to do stand-alone legislation. They're going to wait and see what Nova Scotia does before they look at anything.

I know they're looking at it in the schools. We just met with the minister of education. They want to work with us, if we can, to help them get some new policies in place to deal with this. When we did

the focus groups at the schools, we realized that there are a lot of other issues to be dealt with, as mentioned. There needs to be a safe school act here, which we don't have on the Island.

When we talk with the police, they just keep telling us they need more policies, or nuts and bolts, to deal with issues that we feel are illegal, but they say they don't have enough.

We feel we need to keep advocating, working on this issue, and working with them. We hope that we're going to be able to. They're all very willing to work with us, so we're just going to keep trudging along and see what we can do.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: In addition to the provincial justice systems, do you see a role for the federal government, even in terms of sharing best practices or in terms of criminal law?

Ms. Andy Lou Somers: Yes, definitely.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Do you want to respond?

Ms. Lisa Lachance: We've been involved with the project, Shift, being done by the YWCA. I know that they were in last week.

After hearing from East Prince, it's clear that we're all really at the beginning of our understanding of this. Ongoing support for research, and research plus action, like this particular project stream, is really important.

There's a good role for the federal government, as well, as Alicia said, working with Internet service providers and corporations like Facebook to have a national response and to encourage civil and corporate social responsibility. I think that's really important.

There have been pockets of initiatives that have popped up that have contacted us. It's challenging for a coalition of community groups to stand up to Facebook, Twitter, or Internet service providers to make a difference. Together, I think there's a real concern among community organizations about this, so I think a sort of top-down, bottom-up approach would be really effective.

To your earlier questions about mental health, everyone is talking about the need to create a mental health app. This is part of responding to youth, where youth are at, and when they need help, as Alicia said. It's also part of a response to the mental health in-person services being so limited across the country.

We keep talking in the mental health sector, asking where the app solutions are, what the online solutions are, and yet, the online environment is not safe. I think it's really important, too.

• (1720)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I quickly want to go to something that we heard in the statistics about the fact that this is happening more to girls than to boys. Do you think it's partly because there's more of a stigma on girls, particularly when it comes to cybersexual violence, than there would be on boys? If that's the case, how do we de-stigmatize girls when they're subjected to this?

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: What we've found—

Miss Alicia Raimundo: I was just going to say that I think this comes down to victim blaming, and we have to stop that. Even when you're talking about them participating and sending nudes, that right there is victim blaming, because you don't know what's going on what's causing the pressure to do it. You don't know the sweet-talking and how much their saying they love them is causing that to happen.

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: What we've found—

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt. That's the end of her time. We're going to go to Ms. Vecchio for five minutes. She could continue the questioning, if she wants.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Actually, I'm also going on the mental health stage with this.

Alicia, thank you very much for sharing your different stories and personal story here. The one thing we notice is that mental health of youth is a big concern. You even talked about the young girl going into the hospital and them taking the phone away.

What approaches do you think, as parents, mental health workers, and workers like yourselves, are the best techniques that you use to help the youth who have been victimized? What are some different things that you would recommend for us as legislators to put out there to make sure we educate?

After Alicia is done, this also goes to Prince Edward Island.

Miss Alicia Raimundo: Instead of trying to.... I think some of this asking the youths to just give up their phone or to stay off the Internet comes from wanting to protect them, but I think part of this is about how they're going to receive these messages, so sit down with them and show them that these messages aren't correct. Show them that they're not right about them, that they're not the only ones sharing nudes, and that the guy is kind of the bad person here for sharing it.

As Lisa said, I think we really need to invest in research, evidence-based, but we really need to not be afraid to look at it head-on instead of trying to protect them from it ever happening. It's going to happen—because we don't fully understand why it happens—so sit with the youth, look at the messages, and just let them know that those messages aren't true.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's excellent.

Do you have anything to add from Prince Edward Island?

Ms. Andy Lou Somers: No. We totally agree with that. She said it just as we would.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Fantastic.

You also talked about a safe schools act. Did you indicate that in Nova Scotia or in Prince Edward Island there is nothing like a safe schools act that would be done through the province?

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: Prince Edward Island is one of four provinces that does not have a safer schools act. Off the top of my head, for the other three, I can't ramble them off, but no, we do not have one. In terms of our cyber-safety issues within the school system, that's dated back to the late 1990s, so they're really outdated. There needs to be a complete overhaul.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely. Thank you very much.

To go back to the mental health part, the biggest issue here is not just the people doing it. It's those victims that I think we need to really watch out for. If we were to make a list of priorities.... I think that a lot of times we look at why people are doing this. We'll look at the course...but I think we also have to look at the victims and how we can make sure the victims are protected.

What is the best thing to do? Would you approach it through working with the victims first or would you approach it as a whole 360°, where we're dealing with the victims and trying to deal with the education? How should we prioritize this, since we need to make a difference and we need to make it now? What would some of your priorities be?

• (1725)

Miss Alicia Raimundo: My biggest priority would be to co-design it with the victims, because a really well-intentioned program has turned out to be quite harmful. To say that we're going to bring in cops and try to scare kids by telling them that it's violent.... The minute the cops leave, the kids laugh at them. I think it's really about co-designing with the victims the solutions the victims need, because everyone around them, their support networks, may have opinions on what's happening, but nobody knows it like the victims do.

Ms. Nancy Beth Guptill: Another area that we feel is strongly needed is parent education. What the youths are sharing with us is that a significant percentage will not go to their parents, for a whole host of reasons, or to adults. They see that adults are not in a position to help, because they don't understand the space and they're not able to help with the technology. We see a need for a very strong focus in digital literacy and competency among parents. Also, that education needs to start at the elementary school age level, both at the parent level and at the level of the children.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Perfect.

Also, Alicia, thanks for teaching me new words today. I've never heard of "doxing" and "grouphink", but it's truly that. It's that mob thinking when you look at the young boys or young men who are choosing a young victim like you, and it is horrifying.

From your own experience—and you don't have to answer this question—do you feel like a victim who has moved forward and now is able to help out everybody else? Do you feel that you've moved forward? Where do you feel right now, personally, if you don't mind my asking?

Miss Alicia Raimundo: Actually, I have a really strong support network. I have a partner who's very passionate about this space, so I feel pretty good.

Now Twitter is actually allowing you to report abusive behaviours when you're not the person who is being abused, and that's been a wonderful step in the right direction.

I would say that I feel a tinge of hopelessness for the young people who don't have the supports that I do, the young people who Lisa brought up. They're facing a bunch of barriers and probably homelessness because of the fact that those people are calling people's workplaces and putting their livelihoods in jeopardy. It shouldn't be allowed to happen.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you so much.

The Chair: All right. That's the end of your time.

First of all, I want to thank all of you for testifying and helping us find solutions. That was wonderful.

I also want to thank Ms. Damoff for standing in and doing such a great job in the chair, impromptu, in the informal part of the meeting beforehand.

I have two things for those of you on the committee.

You will be receiving a letter from the clerk. There is an initiative going on to try to light up the Hill in purple on November 15 to recognize the fight against the abuse of women. When you get that

letter, you may want to consider writing a letter of support or whatever.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I would just like to address this.

Peter Fragiskatos, Kate Young, Irene Mathysen, and I, as a non-partisan event, will be hosting this evening. It's with the London Abused Women's Centre and Megan Walker, who around the country is renowned for all the hard work she's done. As a group, we are trying to get the Parliament Building lit up in purple, and we're asking that everybody wear purple that day to show our support. If you wish to write a letter, so that we can ask the both the Speaker of the House and the Speaker to help us out financially by not charging them, that would be awesome.

The Chair: That's on November 15.

On Wednesday, we will have the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and the director of law reform with the West Coast LEAF Association, so there will be lots of focus on the law.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Very quickly, as we often do, I would like to extend an invite to any of the witnesses who might still be on the line, that if you have written supplementary submissions to help clarify anything we heard today, to submit them so we can consider those on the record as well.

The Chair: Yes, thank you very much for reminding me. Good stuff.

Thank you all for your participation. We shall see you on Wednesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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