

Pickering, Ontario March 17, 2022

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women - Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence in Canada.

My Name is Michelle Abel, I am writing to you as a survivor of Familial Trafficking and Abuse. I advocate for the exploited, marginalized, and oppressed. For the past 12 years, I have been working in providing direct support to victims and survivors, fundraises for major events, speaking at conferences and facilitating training on how to detect and respond to cases of Familial Trafficking.

At the age of 16, I started my working and modelling careers. In modelling I was exposed to the exploitative side of the modelling industry ranging from unwanted advances in exchange for shooting opportunities, requests to attend private parties, explicit photo shoots and "promoters" from escort agencies. Eventually I gave up modelling.

Since the age of 19, I was also involved in women's support and empowerment groups, and charitable work.

In my late 30's after battling several health problems and being diagnosed with severe health conditions, I started assisting Women and Children in Human Trafficking, Domestic Violence, Poverty and Orphanages both in Canada and Caribbean Countries and became involved with several Ontario NGO's.

On February 21, 2021, I submitted a Brief to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics - Protection of Privacy and Reputation on Platforms such as Pornhub.

In June 2021, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police invited me as a guest speaker on "Familial Abuse and Human Trafficking: A Crime Against Children". During the training webinar presentation, I integrated my lived experience with the Adverse Childhood Experiences, Neurobiology of Trauma and Coercive Control according to the Biderman's Chart of Coercion.

On February 25, 2022, I submitted a Brief to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights - Review of the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act.

I committed much of my life to fight for those who are trauma-bonded and ending all forms of sexual exploitation of women and children.

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Summary

In my brief, I will be addressing the following: how Sex Trafficking and Intimate Partner Violence are interwoven. Sex trafficking in Canada often happens in the context of an intimate relationship, it is not uncommon for a trafficker/pimp to be a romantic partner and/or the father of trafficked their children.

The high cost of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Adverse Adult Experiences to the economy and society.

How the exposure to Intimate Partner Violence during childhood increases the risk for victimization in sex trafficking during young adulthood.

I will offer some recommendations of legislation that could help mitigate the impacts of Intimate Partner Violence.

How Sex Trafficking and Intimate Partner Violence are interwoven:

We draw many of our perspectives about the world from media outlets. We rely on the news to provide accurate information about current events. We use media to provide us with entertainment. We look to journalists and social media influencers to know which issues we should care about. Given the influence of media on our day-to-day lives, it comes as no surprise that the media has the power to shape our perception of sex trafficking.

However, the media does not always speak about sex trafficking in ways that are helpful, or even accurate. We also have a media that exploits the over sexualization of women and girls.

Visual images are powerful tools in shaping a person's perception of sex trafficking. Stock images of trafficking victims in handcuffs or with highly visible bruises and injuries, whilst representative of the tragic realities of some trafficked individuals, this sends the message that sex trafficking is always visually obvious. These stereotyped images undermine the importance of community members knowing how to recognize less obvious signs of trafficking. In addition, you also have the glamorization of sex trafficking through TV shows like "The Girlfriend Experience", an American anthology drama television series that is broadcast on the premium cable network Starz and available on YouTube, Amazon and on your Rogers TV Service. It is now in its third season. It portrays young female characters, mostly university students, being introduced to the world of transactional relationships by working as high-end escorts. On Netflix, we have the movie "Cuties" that caused an uproar for depicting oversexualized pre-pubescent girls. On the other end of the media spectrum, you have the music industry with lyrics about pimping and prostitution by performers like Snoop Dogg, 50cent or Jay-z among others.

We live in a society that tells us that women are little more than glorified sex objects. This leads movie and TV directors, video game developers, advertisers, clothing designers, toymakers, and everyone else to create more products based on this stereotype, which further promotes the sexualization of children and women.

All of the external pressures we have discussed so far have been around for decades, and in some cases centuries. But in the last decade or so, a new player has come onto the scene; social media. Now young people see impossible standards every waking hour of the day and from people who they perceive to be peers. Instagram models can portray an unrealistic standard that teenagers feel pressured to live up to. Angles, filters, and Photoshopping can do wonders, but these images are portrayed as reality and adolescents are getting on social media and starting to absorb those damaging messages.

This hypersexualization also gives women and girls unrealistic expectations about what their bodies should look like. Children look to media and the adults around them as role models for how to behave. When they see these hypersexual stereotypes, they assume that is the accepted way to interact.

Then we have the pornographic industry that creates unrealistic expectations about women and sexual behavior. Pornography erodes the physical and emotional intimacy in real relationships. Children are exposed to sexual images very young; it shapes their perception of sexual practices and attitudes regarding sexual violence and violence against women. Another effect of pornography is that it causes measurable changes in the brain from reduction in size and activity.

The consumption of pornography can be directly linked to violence against women. Researchers found that the exposure to pornography is linked to adolescent dating violence and sexual aggression.¹ Research on men's sexual aggression has shown that the denial of women's "human uniqueness" is a driving factor for some men who commit sexual offences.² The use of pornography by the abusive partner fuels marital rape and other forms of sexual abuse with its stream of provocative imagery and distortions of sexual activity.

Studies that show that men who go to prostitutes are twice as likely to have watched a porn film in the last year compared to the general population. A study of 854 women from nine countries showed that 47% had been harmed by men who had either forced or tried to force them to do things that they had seen in porn.³

Traffickers benefit from porn films and men who desire to live out a fantasy at the expense of innocent women. In fact, sex traffickers use porn as a training method. Women who are forced into the sex trade are shown what they should expect and how they should behave with a man.

The media occupies an increasingly important role in how we respond to social issues therefore, they must also be responsible stakeholders in how they portray sex trafficking.

Although, many may think that women working in adult entertainment do it because they want to, researchers found that 70% of females who are trafficked, are trafficked into the commercial sex industry, which includes porn, strip clubs, and massage parlors in the United States.⁴

A culture of tolerance surrounds the marketplace of commercial sexual exploitation. The culture of tolerance is derived from a country's history, ethnicity, religious practice, language, political and economic system, and other influences. Cultures of tolerance differ from country to country and sometimes vary within countries or even cities. But the essence is the same; societal acceptance backed by political tolerance. Marketplaces of commercial sexual exploitation require some level of tolerance within the community in order to exist.

It is well documented that the majority of women in sex trafficking have suffered Adverse Childhood Experiences. Adverse Childhood Experiences encompass various forms of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and household dysfunction experienced in childhood. Adverse Childhood Experiences are linked to premature death as well as to various health conditions, including those of mental disorders. Toxic stress linked to childhood maltreatment is related to a number of neurological changes in the structure of the brain and its function.

In a study done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente⁵, researchers followed participants over time, they discovered that a person's cumulative Adverse Childhood Experiences score has a strong, graded relationship to numerous health, social, and behavioral problems throughout their lifespan, including substance use disorders.

¹ Rostad, W. L., Gittins-Stone, D., Huntington, C., Rizzo, C. J., Pearlman, D., & Orchowski, L. (2019). The Association Between Exposure to Violent Pornography and Teen Dating Violence in Grade 10 High School Students. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 48(7), 2137–2147. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-019-1435-4>

² Bevens, C.L., Loughnan, S. Insights into Men's Sexual Aggression Toward Women: Dehumanization and Objectification. *Sex Roles* 81, 713–730 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-01024-0>

³ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/want-to-stop-sex-traffick_b_6563338

⁴ Treasures, L. (2020). Sex Industry & Trafficking Stats. Retrieved August 06, 2020, from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ec6d1c2144482661ecd1f10/t/5f03f1dcb504bf16a2821b45/1594094095409/SEX+INDUSTRY+%26+TREASURES+-+TRAFFICKING+STATS_STATISTICS+%28Download%29.pdf

⁵ Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, Williamson DF, Spitz AM, Edwards V, Marks JS. Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *Am J Prev Med*. 1998 May;14(4):245-58. doi: 10.1016/s0749-3797(98)00017-8. PMID: 9635069.

Many independent prospective studies have now shown that if a mother is stressed, anxious or depressed while pregnant, her child is at an increased risk for having a range of problems, including emotional problems, ADHD, conduct disorder and impaired cognitive development. Both altered brain structure and function have been shown to be associated with prenatal stress, and also the mother's experience of early childhood trauma.

According to the California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences⁶, Toxic Stress, and Health published in December of 2020: Adverse Childhood Experiences increases the risk for 9 out of 10 leading causes of death in the US: Heart Disease 2.1%; Cancer 2.3%; Accidents 2.6%; Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease 3.1%; Stroke 2%; Alzheimer's 11.2%; Diabetes 1.4%; kidney disease 1.7% and Suicide 37%.

Adverse Childhood Experiences costs the state of California \$112.5 Billion in Select Health Conditions and an additional \$19.3 Billion in other sectors (Education, Welfare, Criminal Justice, Lifetime productivity, early death). It is estimated that Adverse Childhood Experiences costs the North American and European economies \$1.3 Trillion Annually.

In the late 70's, the US Department of Health and Human Services commissioned a study on how to tackle Sex Trafficking. The consulting firm reported back with a proposal of "six intervention strategies." Among these: "**reduce negative early childhood experiences**;" "mitigate environmental influences;" and "provide meaningful social roles."

Adverse Adult Experiences is extension research on Adverse Childhood Experiences, the findings indicate that Adverse Adult Experiences can be measured reliably and validly using a brief assessment.

The Adult Experiences Survey (AES) was used to measure 10 adverse and potentially traumatic experiences, including five adversities that reference a current or former partner, spouse or household member: (1) physical or emotional abuse, (2) sexual abuse, (3) alcohol or drug problem, (4) mental health problem, and (5) incarceration or jail. The five other adversities are (6) crime victimization, (7) forced sexual activity by a perpetrator other than a partner, spouse or household member, (8) homelessness, (9) frequent financial problems, and (10) discrimination.

All 10 adversities were correlated with poorer physical and mental health. Results connecting Intimate Partner Violence to poor health are unsurprising in light of prior research.

It is not uncommon that women that suffer with Adverse Childhood Experiences also suffer Adverse Adult Experiences during her life time. The combination of these two Adverse Experiences is detrimental to the wellbeing of women and their offspring.

According to a 2018 National Institutes of Health (NIH), the estimated Intimate Partner Violence lifetime cost was \$103,767 per female victim and \$23,414 per male victim, or a population economic burden of nearly \$3.6 trillion (2014 US\$) over victims' lifetimes, based on 43 million U.S. adults with victimization history. This estimate included \$2.1 trillion (59% of total) in medical costs, \$1.3 trillion (37%) in lost productivity among victims and perpetrators, \$73 billion (2%) in criminal justice activities, and \$62 billion (2%) in other costs, including victim property loss or damage. Government sources pay an estimated \$1.3 trillion (37%) of the lifetime economic burden.

According to a 2003 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Report, the costs of intimate partner rape, physical assault, and stalking exceed \$5.8 billion each year, nearly \$4.1 billion of which is for direct medical and mental health care services. The total costs of Intimate Partner Violence also include nearly \$0.9 billion in lost

⁶ Bhushan D, Kotz K, McCall J, Wirtz S, Gilgoff R, Dube SR, Powers C, Olson-Morgan J, Galeste M, Patterson K, Harris L, Mills A, Bethell C, Burke Harris N, Office of the California Surgeon General. *Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health*. Office of the California Surgeon General, 2020. DOI: [10.48019/PEAM8812](https://doi.org/10.48019/PEAM8812).

productivity from paid work and household chores for victims of nonfatal Intimate Partner Violence and \$0.9 billion in lifetime earnings lost by victims of Intimate Partner Violence homicide.

According to a Health Canada report, the total economic impact of Intimate Partner Violence in Canada in 2009 is estimated at \$7.4 billion. Preventing Intimate Partner Violence is possible and could avoid substantial costs to the economy and society.

Neuroscience has made remarkable discoveries about ways in which our brains and bodies can be affected by traumatic experiences of our parents. We know that children born to survivors of cataclysmic events are themselves more susceptible to stress, and at greater risk of mental illnesses like PTSD, despite never having experienced the trauma themselves. Epigenetics, the in-utero environment, early experiences, and the parent-child relationship all play a role.

Intergenerational Trauma is transmitted through epigenetics inheritance, studies done on holocaust survivors' children and grandchildren found that they have increased likelihood of stress disorders⁷. A Dutch Study done on girls born to Dutch women who were pregnant during a severe famine at the end of the second world war, found that they have an above average risk of developing schizophrenia⁸. Some researcher theorizes that women survivors of traumatic events can pass through their breast milk stress hormones, which impact the health of their children⁹.

Additionally, women with a history of abuse, trauma and mental health problems may pose a threat to the parent-child relationship, and in turn, impact the child's development. The first five years of a child's life are critical for brain development, and as such, early nurturing experiences and relationships with caregivers during this period provide the foundation for later functioning and the overall well-being of the child.

Female survivors of sex trafficking have experienced multiple forms of trauma, including sexual abuse, psychological abuse, violence, and extortion, often across long periods of time. Because of the accumulation of such daily victimization and traumatic experiences, survivors of sex trafficking have higher rates of comorbid mental health disorders (PTSD, major depression, anxiety) and other health problems. The trauma will be passed onto their offspring.

Canadian First Nations have suffered Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adverse Life Experiences for far too long and this has impacted their health and lives. Historical trauma linked to colonial maltreatment, forced assimilation, cultural oppressions, the residential school system, the birth alert system, the forced sterilization of First Nations Women, the enforced poverty for lack of opportunities, the economical exploitation due to high prices of food in Native Reserves or Northern Territories, may also negatively influence parenting patterns and further transmit trauma across future generations through the intergenerational cycle of trauma.

⁷ Dashorst, P., Mooren, T. M., Kleber, R. J., de Jong, P. J., & Huntjens, R. (2019). Intergenerational consequences of the Holocaust on offspring mental health: a systematic review of associated factors and mechanisms. *European journal of psychotraumatology*, *10*(1), 1654065. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2019.1654065>

⁸ Schulz LC. The Dutch Hunger Winter and the developmental origins of health and disease. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2010 Sep 28;107(39):16757-8. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1012911107. Epub 2010 Sep 20. PMID: 20855592; PMCID: PMC2947916.

⁹ Hechler, C., Beijers, R., Riksen-Walraven, J. M., & de Weerth, C. (2018). Are cortisol concentrations in human breast milk associated with infant crying?. *Developmental psychobiology*, *60*(6), 639–650. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dev.21761>

These intragenerational traumas continue to stigmatize Canadian First Nations, making First Nations Women prime targets for sex trafficking (50% of trafficked girls and 51% of trafficked women in Canada are Indigenous).

Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence during childhood increases the risk for victimization in Sex Trafficking during young adulthood. The lasting impacts of exposure to interpersonal violence during childhood affect one's ability to trust others or to perceive future relationships as supportive, thereby increasing the risk for exploitation in Sex trafficking. Furthermore, Intimate Partner Violence and Sex Trafficking share common dynamics. The element of coercive control facilitated by power imbalance and intermittency of abuse has been documented in offender-victim interactions involving Intimate Partner Violence and Sex Trafficking. Sex Trafficking victims are commonly trafficked by an abusive and exploitive intimate partner and victims may be arrested and prosecuted for sex trafficking offenses due to their forced involvement in criminal activities.

Issues of Sex Trafficking and Intimate Partner Violence are often interwoven and identifying someone's experience as one or the other is nearly impossible at times. Sex Trafficking in Canada often happens in the context of an intimate relationship, for example, it is not uncommon for a trafficker to be a romantic partner and/or the father of her children.

Furthermore, it is possible that victims and survivors will not self-identify as having experienced trafficking but "being in an abusive relationship". Because of these similarities, it is not surprising that some Sex Trafficking victims and survivors might choose to access support via the more readily available domestic, intimate partner and family violence shelters.

Intimate Partner Violence almost always follows the same script. It is a truly confounding phenomenon: how is it that men from vastly different cultures know to use the same basic techniques of oppression?

In her ground breaking book *Rape in Marriage*, Diana Russell, originally published 1982, presented two lists side by side: Biderman's Chart of Coercion, and the common techniques of domestic perpetrators. The lists were virtually identical. The only difference was that whereas captors in North Korea deployed the techniques tactically, Intimate Partners appeared to be replicating the system of coercive control unconsciously. Further studies confirm her findings¹⁰.

Harvard psychiatrist and trauma specialist Judith Herman wrote, "The [coercive] methods that enable one human being to enslave another are remarkably consistent." In situations of Intimate Partner Violence, the effect of coercive control is the same: the perpetrator becomes "the most powerful person" in the victim's life, and their psychology is "shaped by the [perpetrator's] actions and beliefs". Domestic perpetrators don't need physical violence to maintain their power – they only have to make their victims believe they are capable of it. This threat is particularly effective, wrote Herman, when it is directed towards loved ones: "Battered women, for example, frequently report that their abuser has threatened to kill their children, their parents, or any friends who harbor them, should they attempt to escape." This atmosphere of threat is enough to "convince the victim that the perpetrator is omnipotent, that resistance is futile, and that her life depends upon winning his indulgence through absolute compliance". Today, we know that that the techniques common to Intimate Partner Violence match those used by practically anyone who trades in captivity: kidnappers, hostage-takers, pimps, cult leaders.

¹⁰ Silvestri, M., & Crowther-Dowey, C. (2008). Women as victims. In *Gender & crime* (pp. 81-108). SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446212721.n4>

Intimate Partner Violence can leave long-term and widespread effects on some women who may have endured years of being repeatedly assaulted, threatened, ridiculed, starved of money and isolated from their family and friends – all done by someone they thought loved them.

Most women affected by Intimate Partner Violence do not commit offences, but in the UK the evidence suggests that for a majority of women in prison, the experience of domestic abuse has been a significant contributory factor. In some cases, there is a direct causal link, where women offend under duress from a partner under threat of harm if they do not comply.

Women can become trapped in a vicious cycle of victimisation and criminal activity. Some women affected by Intimate Partner Violence may be coerced into offending in distinct ways, by engaging in prostitution or by recruiting other women to engage in prostitution. Male perpetrators of domestic abuse may use the criminal justice system as an additional means of exerting power, resulting in the victim/survivor's involvement in crime. There is no effective defence for women driven to offend as a result of abuse.

The UK Government developed a Female Offender Strategy, after several studies they found that there are strong links between women's offending behaviour and their experience of Intimate Partner Violence, Coercive Control and Sexual Abuse. They also found that there is a higher prevalence of mental health problems and self-harm amongst female offenders.

The UK Government in their strategy established three priorities: earlier intervention, an emphasis on community-based solutions, and an aim to make custody as effective and decent as possible for those women who do have to be incarcerated.

Recommendations

I recommend to the committee the consideration of the following Bills that were presented to the House of Commons.

- Bill C-247 October 5, 2020 - amends the Criminal Code to create an offence of engaging in controlling or coercive conduct
- Bill C-233 February 7, 2022 - amends the Criminal Code to require a justice, before making a release order in respect of an accused who is charged with an offence against their intimate partner

Other International Laws

- South Carolina Bill 4563 Cyber Sexual Harassment
- UK Parliament Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- UK Ministry of Justice Female Offender Strategy

I recommend that victims of Intimate Partner Violence who are arrested for crimes be given the same legal protections as victims of Sex Trafficking. Victims of Sex Trafficking can argue their crimes were as a result of exploitation. The reason being that victims of Intimate Partner Violence suffer coercion and threats and may find themselves forced to commit an offence in order to guarantee their safety or the safety of their children. In some cases, women do not reveal the abuse they have suffered until they are in prison, making it impossible for it to be taken into account by police and other criminal justice agencies.

The amendments to the laws are needed to address the recognised link between abuse and women's offending.

I recommend concentrate the “Crisis Centers” or more commonly known as “Rape Crisis Centers” in all hospitals and major healthcare centers. This would allow easy access to victims in a non-threatening way for them to gain access to all needed assistance and services. In this way, the only excuse victims would need to make to their abusers is “I am not feeling well and I am going to the hospital”.

In addition to this, these “Crisis Centers” should concentrate all necessary services that a victim may need in the same place. Currently, in Ontario, the only way to gain knowledge of all available resources is through the Services Ontario Website. But all the services are scattered or only accessible by phone. In most of the cases the victim does not have access to internet or phone or the access is monitor by the abusive partner.

These “Crisis Centers” should be Trauma-Informed and Victim Centered Places. The victims should be allowed to access services and resources without the mandatory need to disclose to law enforcement. But all the evidence should be collected by Nurses specialized in SANE (*Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners*) and Forensic interviewers that can video record the statements of the victim and keep a chain of evidence in the event the victim decided to disclose to the police. It would be an important asset and this would reduce the lack of evidence that Law Enforcement finds, if an amount of time passes between the incident and the disclosure.

All evidence collection protocols and chain of evidence in these “Crisis Centers” should be standardized and supervised by Law Enforcement and Justice System.

Conclusion

In an ideal world, we would have a society that would value every one of its members equally, and with that said, society would put a higher value on women, children, elderly and people with disabilities.

But we do not live in that ideal world.

In order to eliminate Adverse Childhood Experiences, Adverse Adult Experiences, Intragenerational Trauma, Intimate Partner Violence, and Commercial Sexual Exploitation, we need to change our culture beliefs and mentalities.

Until that change happens, laws need to be put in place in order to protect the most vulnerable.

We need to understand that Adverse Childhood Experiences, Adverse Adult Experiences, Intragenerational Trauma, Intimate Partner Violence, and Commercial Sexual Exploitation, creates a different type of victim and they require special attention from Legislators, Law Enforcement, Justice System, Social Services and society at large.

These individuals that were victimized suffered an assault on their essence as a person. We cannot allow this to continue.

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