

Personal Disclosure - March 31, 2022

Dear Status of Women Committee:

Please accept my anonymous Brief submission.

My intention of submitting this Brief is to provide some insight from my lived-experience exposure to Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence.

A key point I want to demonstrate is that separate categories of violence are often falsely viewed as single sphere with their own circumstances. Mainstream society does not understand the complexity and hierarchy of violence, their role in it, and how the different forms of violence are fundamentally interconnected.

My lived experience will demonstrate that the continuum of violent experiences I have endured are not separate, and very much interconnected. I am now going into my sixth decade of life.

Early Childhood:

During my early childhood I experienced and witnessed violence in my home. My father was an alcoholic, and could not control his rage or violent behaviour. I learned just a few years ago that he was unemployed, but left for work daily, withholding the fact that he had quit his job as an engineer.

My home life felt chaotic, fear-based, full of violence, and as a child I recall feeling scared and sad, often crying myself to sleep. All of us in the family experienced his violence, demoralizing mistreatment, physically and emotionally. I have memories of watching in horror as he was physical with my mother and continued to beat, berate, and demoralize my oldest brother. This oldest brother learned to replicate this violent behaviour by engaging in violence and emotional abuse against me.

“As the only female child in my family, my oldest brother severely violently attacked me throughout my childhood years; he regularly punched me in the head and stomach, kicked me, called me names, demoralized me at home and in front of other children, only referred to me by a nickname, NEVER my name. I witnessed him harming animals and; holding my pet kitten under-water in our rain barrel, sticking lit firecrackers in frogs throats. He kicked a neighbour-youth teeth out, he hit me so hard in the head that I remember thinking that I saw stars. I often ran into the woods and hid.”

I was sick often, missing school, with severe stomach problems. I could not sleep, and I did not do well in school; by grade 4, I was held back in a special reading class. And in my late teens, ended up in the hospital.¹

¹ <https://acestoohigh.com/2013/08/07/terrifying-children-into-a-life-of-asthma/>

These are a few of my dormant memories that I had tucked away and carried with me. I now realize why I had feelings of fear to speak-up; I had not learned how to safely express my feelings.

My oldest brother continued this violent behaviour towards me into adulthood, threatening me with physical violence and later years threatened me with economic violence until I communicated for him to never contact me again. He continues to display enraged coercive control over my mother, over my adult brother and anyone who interferes with his plans. I remember my mother telling me he was once flown home from work for mistreating his staff of men working on oil rigs.

Adolescent and Teen Years:

I was exposed to sexual assault from a dermatologist² during an unaccompanied examination and sexual-predator behaviour from my stepfather who drank daily, often excessively. I experienced men exposing themselves to me in public spaces two different times at bus stop and while in a phone booth, another man tried to lure me into his car, one man tried to enter my home while watching me in the kitchen and I later learned was watching me through my bedroom window.

“These are just some of my experiences, all of which I didn’t talk about. Upon reflection I have always carried with me that sense of fear I developed in early childhood.”

Early Adulthood:

When I had children and a family of my own, I experienced intimate partner violence. My own children were exposed to family violence, compounded by psychological abuse and toxic masculinity. My son was a gentle-sole and really struggled.

“One memory that stays with me, is when the doctor asked me what happened to my arm, and my 2-year-old baby-son answered “daddy burned mommy’s arm with the iron. I cannot forget when I saw clear signs affecting my son. My daughter did not show affected signs until her late teens. I am learning now how this exposure affects baby in vitro, during pregnancy and how the stress impacts mom and unborn baby.”

My parenting skills were hyper-vigilant because of my exposure to violence.³ Upon reflective insight now, I could have prevented this toxic stress exposure to my children, had I understood

² <https://www.sexassault.ca/doctor.htm>

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-20/former-prosecutor-awarded-435k-after-court-finds-opp-breache/11981966>

my own vulnerability to not recognizing risk factors. Having access to parental supports would have greatly benefited me and my children.

I packed up my children, threw my keys in the garbage at the airport and left, starting a new life. Over the next several years, I completed two degrees, one a Master Degree, through distance and weekends, while working and raising two children on my own. This was a significant accomplishment for me, as in my childhood I struggled in school.

“I learned through my studying process that I never had reading and retention challenges, and later discovered, it was my exposure to adversity that was impacting my ability to concentrate, absorb information and learn.”

I worked extremely hard to re-establish myself as a female-led-household, sole parent, and financial provider to my children. But my right to equality in the workplace never seemed to transpire. Even though I had earned awards for achieving top performance metrics, I still experienced sex discrimination in a job that was male dominated; when they downsized, I lost my job.

Middle Adulthood:

After I had retrained and secured another very good job, in a leadership position, I experienced sexual harassment, misogyny, and psychological harm. These behaviours not only affected me but also students, faculty, and others. After bringing the complaints to HR from myself and others, I lost my job.

I was made to sign a Non-Disclosure Confidentially Agreement in order to receive severance pay. And more retaliation followed in several different ways; over time, I learned with devastation that I was not securing similar sector positions. I applied diligently within different provinces to every job for which I qualified and had the required experience; however, I was never able to secure a similar job in that sector again.

“This reputational harm was a game changer for me.⁴ This was a different form of violence and a different form of violation. For me this was psychologically debilitating, it harmed my ability to earn a living, it targeted my dignity and sense of accomplishment for what I worked so hard for. It erased the purpose of why I sacrificed time lost with my children while retraining and rebuilding my career over and over again. My work is part of my identity, self-worth and emotional wellbeing. This experience erased my identity as a female professional leader.”

“I realize now Misogyny is driving vetting practices.”

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/sep/21/i-had-to-start-over-alone-and-silenced-the-fight-to-end-nda-abuse>

Links between IPV and Sexual Harassment:

Based on my experience, this non-disclosure agreement is an occupational health and safety hazard and risk. It heightened an additional form of workplace violence. In addition to sexual harassment and psychological harm it also ignited economic violence through job loss and retaliation and employment gaps impacting career derailment. It was a workplace injury.^{5,6}

“Research corroborates significant links between prior IPV and Sexual Harassment.”

Sexual harassment and other forms of IPV share many underlying linkages, consequently co-victimization.⁷ Cultures that normalize sexual violence sustain gendered power differences, possess misogynistic attitudes and encourage victim-blaming belief systems that foster sexual harassment and other forms of violence that tolerates and desensitizes violence against women.⁸ General theories of crime offer frameworks for understanding how certain work environments may foster sexual harassment either concurrently with other forms of IPV or as a form of revictimization.⁹

Violence against women in the workplace has increased from historical male dominated sectors such as policing, military, offshore drilling sites, military universities, into profile sectors where female hold more public power such as female journalists and female politicians.¹⁰

Late Adulthood:

I pivoted my career again moving into the social service sector. This sector can be known for hiring a vulnerable population as staff. The work was rewarding, working with staff who served vulnerable community members.

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260733404_Situating_Sexual_Harassment_in_the_Broader_Context_of_Interpersonal_Violence_Research_Theory_and_Policy_Implications

6 <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/JAHA.121.023015>

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260733404_Situating_Sexual_Harassment_in_the_Broader_Context_of_Interpersonal_Violence_Research_Theory_and_Policy_Implications

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260733404_Situating_Sexual_Harassment_in_the_Broader_Context_of_Interpersonal_Violence_Research_Theory_and_Policy_Implications

10 <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/special-representatives/gender-issues/report-17/4247-2021-report-by-the-special-representative-on-gender-issues-violence-against-women-journalists-and-politicians-a-growing-crisis/file>

“I quickly discovered that toxic masculinity behaviour exists with females, and for some who hold leadership roles expected to uphold principles of substantive equality, diversity, inclusion when leading both vulnerable employees and clients and working with traumatized populations. I witnessed yet another form of violence.”

This highlights the kind of dynamics at play within a culture of organizations that serve vulnerable community, many exposed to violence, and childhood adversity. When employees report concerns, relating to occupational health and safety risks, or human rights violations they often experience workplace violence in the form of bullying, psychological harm and retaliation.

“Those who punish truth-tellers rarely get the truth. A crucial aspect of social justice is learning the difference between intent and impact”

A crucial aspect of social justice is learning the difference between intention of fulfilling organizational mandates and the impact it has on clients and employees which does matter. The psychological health and safety of an organization matters. The link here to IPV is the revictimization of vulnerable people, employees and clients who have been exposed to childhood adversity and have a history of exposure to violence.

Final Words:

“Violence is not a private problem nor a single sphere problem to be examined with its own circumstances. It is a complex public health problem, interconnected and embedded in all areas of our society.”

The key takeaway is:

All my experiences are firmly positioned in the continuum of violence, rooted in family violence, transgenerational dysfunction, that manifested in different ways throughout my life. An underlying theme, in my view, is vulnerability linked to interpersonal violence and revictimization. I didn't know about boundaries, red-flags or manipulation or the warning signs. My experience with violence all happened in plain sight. As my grandfather was a Member of Parliament, we had a certain societal status and no one outside the family thought to question anything. I don't think many people ever really knew there was abuse, nor recognized the signs or forms of violence.

My recommendations for the Status of Women Standing Committee are:

- ◆ I support the themes outlined in multiple recommendation from expert witnesses and Briefs already submitted to the Committee.

- ◆ Close service gaps by investing in **services for parents exposed to childhood adversity and Intimate partner violence**. Support healthy parenting skills and healthy interactions to meet the needs of children.
- ◆ **Public Education Curriculum for children: starting by or before age five**. By age twelve, the harm from the compounded risk factors had already impacted my life path and my brother's. Educate children about the wide spectrum of feelings and harm, boundaries, safe spaces, see something say something, accepting differences, non-violent communication, understand importance of substantive equality.
- ◆ **Public Health Campaigns:** Education mainstream society to understand the complexity and hierarchy of violence and how the different forms of violence are interconnected. Name the different forms of violence, provide examples of equality looks like in healthy relationships and in unhealthy relationships, microaggressions, jokes that harm others, education on links between cruelty to animals and violence against women. Strong consistent campaigns to shift behaviours, and interventions similar to strategies that impact permanent change i.e. *seat belt legislation and anti-smoking campaigns*.¹¹
- ◆ **Implement screening for exposure to family and IPV violence** during contact with health care providers, hospital settings and therapy screenings, prior to diagnosis. I was never screened.
- ◆ **Support legislation** to end Non-Disclosure Confidentiality Agreements linked to sexual violence, harassment, and retaliation.
- ◆ Strive for improved legislation on workplace violence, sexual harassment consistent explicit language and similar to federal standards-Bill C-65 and provincial Bill-132-Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan to improve employment standards in Canada, across all provinces and territories.^{12, 13, 14}
- ◆ **Standardize required training for Employment Recruiters to knowledge to recognize signs of exposure to workplace violence**, and potential candidates who may have signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement due to sexual harassment, or a toxic unsafe workplace. Industry standards invest in prevention strategy to end workplace violence manifesting through third party vetting and recruitment practices.

¹¹ <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/policy-advocacy/link-between-animal-child-domestic-abuse>

¹² <https://peninsulacanada.com/blog/health-and-safety/bill-c-65-heres-what-employers-need-to-know/>

¹³ <https://cupe.ca/new-federal-violence-and-harassment-legislation-bill-c-65>

¹⁴ <https://www.canadaemploymenthumanrightslaw.com/2021/10/understanding-your-employer-obligations-under-bill-132-sexual-violence-and-harassment-action-plan/>

- ◆ **Invest in Neighbourhood Houses (NH)** to widen responsive community-driven initiatives, meeting the needs of the whole person, the whole family, the whole neighbourhood, rooted in the fundamental philosophy of equality, directly improving social determinates of health for all who live in our community. I have witnessed children meet parents (exposed to homelessness) access NH to cook in community kitchen together & enjoy a meal and visit with parents in a healthy, safe setting.
- ◆ Examine and close the barriers impacted by the “Jordan Threshold” which sets 18-month limits between laying of charges and the actual or anticipated end of a trial in provincial court. In superior courts, the ceiling is 30 months; impacting homicide, sexual assault cases, where an alarmingly high pending cases currently over the threshold are being dropped stay of proceedings.¹⁵

Thank you for considering my reflective insight that I have gained from my lived-experience,

Anonymous Author

¹⁵ http://www.cacc-acje.ca/en/index.php/front/news_details/n.s._court_backlog_worsening_due_to_covid_and_the_jordan_ticker