

March 31, 2022  
Standing Committee on the Status of Women Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6  
Canada

To whom it may concern,

Please accept the attached submission for your study on intimate partner violence in Canada. I wish for my submission to be anonymous as I have safety concerns around offering this information if I can be identified by my ex partner or his family. However, I am more than happy to have my brief made public in order for it to be usefulness to others investigating this issue. Regrettably, I am not able to reference specific bills as requested, but I hope that this will still provide some insight into the study.

In light of my submission, I offer the following suggestions:

- 1) *I suggest a nation wide advertising campaign educating people about IPV that is focused on other forms of abuse, not limited to physical.*
- 2) *I suggest making trauma, and IPV part of all counselling and psychology programs.*
- 3) *I suggest that mandatory screening by care providers of pregnant woman include information about coercive control, manipulation, gaslighting and projection. 4) I suggest that trauma informed care, training and consistently updated knowledge be a part of maintaining licensing for all new and currently practicing family care providers.*
- 4) *I suggest that a standard process for parenting evaluations be created in addition to a way to hold evaluators accountable be created.*
- 5) *I suggest that each and every person working in the family law system be educated and then made to do inservice/update courses on a biannual basis around domestic violence, coercion, power & control imbalances, financial abuse, spiritual abuse, covert abuse including intimate partner sexual abuse, and mental/emotional abuse.*
- 6) *I suggest that coercion and control be made criminal offences so that we are not disregarded and dismissed when we need to call the police because we are trapped by him, threatened by him, or medically neglected by him and in immediate distress and in emotional and potentially physical danger. It should not take injury, hospitalization, or death to bring help to end the behaviour.*
- 7) *I suggest that in BC only judges who choose and want to preside in family law cases do so, rather than judges who specialize in other areas of law having to serve their mandatory time in family law courts.*
- 8) *I suggest that programs such as the NSRLP receiving much more funding so that people with low incomes can learn how to represent themselves, and learn the basics of the court system so they can make better informed choices.*
- 9) *I suggest MCFD be better funded and that all social workers receive training on IPV that isn't just limited to physical abuse, in addition to appropriate trauma responses and safety strategies/safety planning in situations of abuse. I suggest that they be given clear education and information about how dangerous it is to share confidential information with the abuser.*

*10) I suggest that in cases where abuse is in question, SAFETY needs to be the first line of defence for the person reporting IPV. Safety strategies, safety planning, and Confidentiality should be the norm, and not the afterthought.*

I was in an abusive relationship for 18 years. We were married for 12 of those years, at which time the abuse escalated to such an extreme that I could no longer function physically or emotionally. I would have left much sooner, but there were many factors that limited my ability to leave. First, I didn't even realize I was being abused: everything that is spoken about openly (if at all) focuses on direct physical violence - hitting, injuring, battering. That was not what happened to me. The abuse that I survived was drawn out over many years, daily, and relentless. My partner was focused on power and control, and held a belief within him that he needed to be tough and masculine, and be the dominating voice and body in the household, while outwardly speaking up that he was intelligent, superior, not to be questioned, and announced out loud that he was also a feminist. He regularly used a variety of tactics to control and little me, including coercion, shaming, and verbal abuse. He threatened me indirectly and was constantly changing the narrative, using gaslighting and shame, attacking my intuition and my intellect until I no longer knew truth in his perspective or what was coming next. I often did not know which version of him I was going to meet at any given moment. I was in a constant state of fear and my body and mind felt like they were always under attack.

In the years prior to the marriage, I was an academic and studied both English Literature and Biological systems at the University of British Columbia. I had many friends, a close knit community through the mennonite church and youth and sports programs that I had grown up in, a warm and deep connection with my family including my two siblings, a love for travel, and spent much of my free time following my other passion spending time in the wilderness and the outdoors creating art and photography. I was in constant wonder of the world and the people in it.

***By the time my marriage ended in 2017, I had lost almost all of these aspects of myself due to the trauma I experienced through IPV.***

***My partner realized that though I stood up for myself in moments of strength, the deepest way he could injure me was through our children.*** He screamed at me and berated me in front of them, would whisper in their ears audibly all of the ways in which I was failing them as a parent, would threaten to kick them out of the house if they misbehaved (my oldest was 5 years old at the time), would slam doors and kick cupboards if he did not get what he wanted. When my older son was able to interact more directly, the shaming and berating turned to him as well: he was chastised for making mistakes, screamed at when he couldn't do an action perfectly after being shown just once (tying his shoes was terrifying - he would cry in panic each time we would leave the house as he struggled with his shoes).

My partner often threatened to hit me, or the children, but did not follow through - or if he did get physical, he was very careful to leave no evidence - no marks. He spoke often about how he "wished I would just *let* him hit them" or how "maybe he would hit them if they ever did *that* again". He often spoke of how he had physically hurt others in the past, and would rush towards me, or square his shoulders and make himself big, clench his fists and pull his arm back as if he was going to hit, but then wouldn't. He would throw objects so that it would whistle past my face and ears. My body was in a constant state of fear. There was always the possibility of being hurt or hit, but the way in which he treated me left me broken in ways that felt worse than any physical injury I had ever suffered in all of my years of adventuring prior to being married to him. In the end I hoped, wished that he would just hit me. It would have been easier to define, easier to explain to others, easier to heal. ***Now my insides, my mind, my emotions are battered to a point where I can no longer tell where one bruise ends and the other begins. The first question asked is so often "did he hit you?" - my answer has become "No, but I would rather he had".***

***After I left, the abuse did not end.*** It continued through the legal process, he emotionally and verbally attacked my children with information that only we had shared during meetings with a parenting coordinator or counsellor, he withheld them from me in anger for months at a time, and he chose to limit their access to medical care and safety in several ways and continues to do so. ***He realized that much of his behaviour towards me directly did not reach me as deeply anymore, so he turned his abusive behaviour onto our two sons.***

**One of the greatest barriers to safety in all of this has been the lack of trauma informed care available**, and the lack of knowledge/training of support staff, care providers, medical professionals, counsellors, and legal professionals with respect to any abusive behaviour outside of the physical spectrum. The focus of the IPV knowledge base turns its gaze towards physical violence but away from other forms. This is NOT the only kind of violence. This is not the only kind of abuse. **The depth and attention put into coercion and gaslighting in these relationships make you doubt even yourself, and just as much effort is put into denying it and discrediting anyone who speaks up.** In addition to the crazy-making behaviour, **it is often unsafe to leave, or get out, or speak up.** Often professionals or care providers or consultants even shared information with my ex partner that either myself or my son had shared (supposedly in confidence) about his behaviour, and upon returning home he would have found out somehow, and the abuse would escalate - often running through several days. It became unsafe to reach out, and even when we did, many would say that no one would help us, because the abuse was not physical, so nothing could be done. **IT IS NOT SAFE FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE TO HAVE ABUSE ALLEGATIONS SHARED WITH THEIR ABUSER!!!** I cannot emphasize this enough. It is common practice for medical practitioners, and MCFD to share statements of abuse by the abusers partner or child WITH the abuser. This is so dangerous. This ESCALATES the abuse. This is where IPV victims move from victims to statistics. This at the very least increases the incidence of abuse and trauma, and at the worst, deadly.

**My abuse was not directly physical - it WAS emotional, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, verbal, financial, sexual, coercive, and indirectly physical** (threats but no injuries, he would chase me and my son, hold me down or pin my son to his bed and scream, but leave no bruises), and medically controlling in the case of myself and both of my sons.

The abuse I survived was not physical, but **the physical effects and symptoms it has left in my body have been agonizing, real and long lasting.** I still cannot make it through a full day without experiencing one form of residual pain or another that lingers from the past abuse, and the *ongoing reach that he has through the shared custody of my younger son.*

In this past year, my oldest son - 12 years old now - has refused to return to his father's home, citing behaviour that parallels what I experienced in my relationship to him. My son became so afraid that he became immobilized and could not return, could not go to school, could not leave the house, could not even speak some moments he was in a state of such deep terror and shame. His father took me to court and cited denial of parenting time, alienation, mental health concerns, and accused me directly through his legal representation of lying. All of these accusations were proven wrong through evidence, and my son was able to speak loudly through a VOC report, and he no longer has to attend at his fathers home in addition to receiving personal counselling that focuses on his own trauma, and at his pace.

**Intimate Partner abuse does NOT stop at the partner, it extends to their children.**

My youngest son continues to attend their father's home, as he is non-verbal and has special needs. Though he exhibits extreme signs that he is under stress and duress, and his epilepsy is neglected to the point where he is in danger on a regular basis, no one will step forward to speak for him alongside me, as it has become "known" that the court will not help a mother whose child is being abused by his father, lest it be labelled as alienation and they become complicit. A mother who is trying to do what is best to give a voice to their child, teen, or self in a case of IPV is NOT alienating the child from the unhealthy parent. She is trying to speak out for their safety - she is trying to make sure they survive.

Though I know this doesn't provide clear strategies, it does point to several and I have included a list on my cover page that outlines some more direct strategies relating to our experiences. I'm hoping it provides a window into some of the behaviour we experienced so that it can begin to open doors to investigation of policies so that others don't have to live through this waking nightmare. I'm ready to wake up from it now, but it just continues.