



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 004**

Tuesday, February 8, 2022

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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio





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• (1540)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)):** I'd like to call this meeting to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Tuesday, February 4, 2022, the committee will resume its study on intimate partner and domestic violence in Canada.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from public health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe the following is recommended for all those attending the meeting in person.

Anyone with symptoms should participate in Zoom and not in person. Everyone must maintain two-metre physical distancing, whether seated or not. Everyone must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room, and it's recommended that you keep your mask on at all times, even if you're seated. Everyone present must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer at the room entrance. Committee rooms are cleaned before and after meetings, and we're asking that if you're leaving your seat you wipe the seat off as well, just to help out for the next person.

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

You may speak in both official languages, of course. For all the people who are on here today, just to ensure you know, there are translation services on here. Go to the interpretation and choose your language. Before speaking, please wait until your name is recognized. Just as a reminder, please make sure you put your booms down, too, so that it's easier for us to understand you in getting things controlled.

I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly, so try not to speak like me.

Before we begin, I would like to inform members that the committee received a report in one official language only, from Women's Shelters Canada. Because the report is quite substantial—about 400 pages—the translation bureau will not be available to provide a translation of the report before the end of the study. Nonetheless, I believe it's important for all the members to have access to this report and for the committee to take it into consideration for this study.

I would like to seek the approval of this committee to have the executive summary of the report translated, which is about 10 pages.

Just as a little more information, Lise Martin has provided us an excellent document that was just recently written. This document of about 150 pages has information, a bibliography, testimony and footnotes. There are a lot of great things in there.

I believe that if we were to ask for the executive summary, we'd be able to get that translated. By doing it as part of the committee and saying that we need at least this part translated for us, that would be good. Then, for us, we could on our own be able read the rest of the report. Officially, it was received in only one official language, but this is an exceptional report that we should be looking at.

I'm just going to ask the committee this: Is it the will of the committee to proceed to ask them to take the executive summary and to translate it on our behalf, so that we are able to have this to add to our study notes and to our report? Can I get a show of hands?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Happy joyful. Clerk, you have your marching orders. If you could ensure that we get that done, that would be wonderful.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I'd like to provide this trigger warning. We will be discussing experiences related to violence and assaults. This may be triggering to viewers with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or you need help, please advise the clerk. I think that's really important for all the witnesses, all of the people who are on these panels, the questioners, and us as members of Parliament. Let's just be recognizing that these are very difficult discussions that we are having, so let's always try—although it's never going to be light-hearted—to be compassionate, especially to the people we're speaking to.

On today's first panel, I'm really excited to welcome the Sudbury Women's Centre and Giulia Carpenter. If I pronounce your name wrong, please correct me.

From Women's Shelters Canada, we have Lise Martin. Welcome, Lise.

Also, from West Central Women's Resource Centre, we have Lorie English.

Each of you will have five minutes. I have my beautiful little watch here right now. I will start the winding up for you, but we're asking all of you to try to stay within five minutes, especially since time is so crazy right now.

I'm going to pass it over to Giulia for five minutes.

You have the floor.

**Mrs. Giulia Carpenter (Executive Director, Sudbury Women's Centre):** Good afternoon and thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is Giulia and I'm the executive director of the Sudbury Women's Centre, which is located in northern Ontario. The Sudbury Women's Centre offers a safe place to support women in their journey, in getting from where they are now to where they want to be. We've been helping women in our community for over 40 years.

Like all organizations in Canada, we know that the number of domestic violence situations has increased over the years. This pandemic has created a spike in intimate partner violence as we've seen an increase in financial and mental health strains on the family due to COVID. These lockdowns meant many women were unsafe in their own homes, with fewer ways to escape the atmosphere of abuse and control. According to a spokesperson from the Sudbury police, from March 17 to May 26, 2020, Sudbury police fielded 367 domestic dispute calls, which is an increase of 7% since 2019. We'll learn the exact numbers only when reporting is published and when women come forward with their stories.

As I stated in the beginning, we offer a safe place for women to escape what is happening in the outside world. In 2019, we saw an average of 150 to 250 women access our centre per week. That could be attending a workshop that we have, using computers in our library, or getting some free clothing for themselves and their children.

Once the pandemic hit, we followed the public health regulations and closed the centre. We continued to offer support for our clients virtually, over the phone, or met with them at the centre to do curbside pickup for some of their basic need items. Due to the closures, women did not have our centre to visit during the day and get away from their abusers for a couple of hours, to sit with staff and do safety plans.

In 2020, we were physically open for six months and we still saw over 2,700 women seek our support. We did our best to keep up with the demands of our clients and the staff capacity that we had.

We know there are so many other women who are trying to access our services or others within the community. Collaboration has become an important element for us, and this pandemic really showcases the importance of working together and supporting one another.

Our staff mental health has also been an important element in terms of learning to handle the pressures of COVID in their own lives and dealing with burnout.

In the last bit of time, I want to share one story from our community, told via The Sudbury Star, our local newspaper. This is not a story from one of our clients; it details one abuser's dealings with domestic violence, not in just one incident but in three separate inti-

mate partners over a span of a year and a half, as well as violence towards children. This one story shows the need to increase support in our community for intimate partner violence and mental health support for women and children, and to support staff who are helping these clients.

In September 2020, the abuser and his partner became separated. The abuser came to the woman's home, used physical violence on the woman, her son and his teenage daughter. He pulled out a switchblade, put it to his daughter's throat and pushed her head in towards a wall. The abuser told his partner that he was so mad he could seriously hurt his teenage daughter.

In May 2021, the abuser was in a new relationship with a second woman. She called police to report that the abuser had beaten her and she had fled to a friend's residence. The abuser had grabbed her hand, pushed her head into the wall, and put his thumbs into her eye sockets. He proceeded to verbally assault her while choking her.

In October 2021, a third woman called police, reporting that the same abuser was upset that she had ended their relationship, and that he had been harassing her through social media and texts.

It was brought up in court that the abuser had suffered from emotional and verbal abuse as a child, as he had seen domestic violence in his own home. This is a cycle that needs to be broken, as the children he has abused now need that help.

One of the women wrote in a victim statement, "Because of these offences, I haven't been able to sleep at night; I can't open my windows at all because I am afraid to do so. In my home, I feel that someone is looking in through my windows.... I am afraid to leave my home. I am afraid he will be outside the door. I can't trust anyone...."

In closing, the Sudbury's Women Centre is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to providing information, referrals and support services to women who've been impacted by violence and/or difficult life situations. I'm confident in the investments by the government to address intimate partner violence in reports, and that within organizations we will create that positive change that we're looking for. It will take time and collaboration with other organizations, but I do see this happening.

We're committed to serving the needs of women in our community, to create and maintain a safe environment that is inclusive and respectful of diversity.

Thank you.

● (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Giulia. That was well done.

We'll now pass it over to Lise Martin, from Women's Shelters Canada.

Go ahead, Lise. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Lise Martin (Executive Director, Women's Shelters Canada):** Thank you very much for this invitation.

Women's Shelters Canada brings together 15 provincial and territorial shelter organizations representing over 600 shelters across Canada.

The COVID pandemic has challenged us all on so many levels. For women and children living with violence, the anguish is indescribable. As reported by the Canadian observatory on femicide, last month alone 20 women died by femicide. That is one woman every day and a half. These are not merely statistics. Last week, her name was Ashley Wadsworth from Vernon, B.C.

The first point I'd like to make is that intimate partner violence, domestic violence and gender-based violence are non-partisan issues. My plea to you today is to always keep this front and centre in your deliberations. No one is immune to intimate partner violence and domestic violence. They do not discriminate.

However, there are differential impacts. Certain groups of women face much higher levels of violence. Among them are first nation, Inuit and Métis women, women with disabilities, racialized women and trans women.

I will focus on two roles of Women's Shelters Canada. Firstly, it is the organization that oversaw the distribution of COVID emergency funds to shelters. Secondly, it is the organization that, since its inception in 2013, has been bringing together civil society organizations to advocate for a national action plan.

March 13, 2020 is one of those dates that is etched in our memory. Within a week, we were in discussions with WAGE on how emergency funds could be expedited to shelters. We realized this was a huge undertaking, and as a team of six we knew our world was about to turn upside down. We were, however, compelled to take this on, as shelters were in dire need of these supports, and we knew we could deliver quickly and efficiently.

There was and is no partisanship in this exercise. All shelters had access to the same amount of funds and all were contacted at the same time. By April 4, 2020 funds started flowing to shelters. In 2020, Women's Shelters Canada transferred \$36 million to shelters across the country. The average per shelter was \$99,000. Many shelters could not have remained open had these funds not been provided.

*[Technical difficulty—Editor]* commitment *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* in 2021. Women's Shelters Canada is in the process of distributing \$81 million to shelters for response and recovery.

Collaboration between civil society organizations, between civil society organizations and government, and between the federal and provincial governments has made it possible for women and children to continue to access services throughout the pandemic.

On behalf of shelters and transition houses, I'd like to thank the federal government for its leadership in providing these emergency funds to GBV services, and for recognizing the life-saving work they accomplish day in and day out. As we move, hopefully, out of this pandemic, we are looking to the federal government to show

this same level of leadership and to provincial governments to show this same level of collaboration, in order to move forward with the national action plan.

In January of 2021, working with over 40 GBV experts from across the country, we embarked on a massive and highly ambitious four-month project to develop a framework for Canada's national action plan.

Why do we need a national action plan? Simply put, the levels of services and protection provided to women and people of marginalized genders should not depend on their postal codes.

One of the questions we answered was this: What will it take for Canada's national action plan to be successful? It will need to have independent oversight and evaluation; billions, not millions, in investments; an all-of-government approach; co-operation and coordination between federal, provincial and territorial governments; the voices and experiences of those most affected at the centre; and systemic solutions for systemic problems.

The end product of this project was a comprehensive report, which we are tabling for the committee in the context of this study, that provides a ready road map for the national action plan and its secretariat.

During last Friday's session, the question was asked about the plan's 10-year timeline, which seemed to be long. A NAP is about systemic change. Systemic change takes time, and Canada's national action plan must be developed in a way that will allow it to bring this change, regardless of which government is in power.

We owe it to the 44% of women who will experience violence at one point in their lives and to the hundreds of women and children who lose their lives each year as a result of domestic violence.

• (1550)

Let's not forget that domestic violence is a non-partisan issue.

Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Lise, and thanks for watching my pen. You guys are awesome.

I will now pass it on to Lorie English with the West Central Women's Resource Centre.

You have five minutes.

**Ms. Lorie English (Executive Director, West Central Women's Resource Centre):** Thank you and good afternoon, honourable members of Parliament and distinguished colleagues.

Thank you for the invitation to present to this committee today.

My name is Lorie English, and I am the executive director at the West Central Women's Resource Centre.

Our centre is located in downtown Winnipeg, and we've been providing supports to women and gender-diverse people throughout the city for more than 20 years. One of the critical services we provide is supporting people who have experienced gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is one of the most pervasive health risks to women and gender-diverse people in Canada. It also has one of the most underfunded responses to a health risk. Evidence has demonstrated that intimate partner violence is dramatically under-reported in Canada. Only about a third of women report violence to police. As a result, our ability to gather data and to respond to the enormity of this problem has been limited, but here is what we do know.

On average, it takes seven times to successfully leave a violent situation. This is due in large part to the lack of a sustained response to experiences of violence. The lack of resources, once the crisis is over, often leads women back to violence.

We need supports that both respond to the immediate crisis and assist women and gender-diverse people to rebuild their lives once they've exited violence.

The impacts of gender-based violence are tremendous. Victims often experience chronic illness, stress, increased problematic substance use and increased mental health conditions. Children who are victims of violence can see negative impacts with their health and development and are increasingly likely to become involved in violent relationships later in life. Men who are perpetrators of violence have often previously been victims of violence and therefore need to heal their own trauma as part of the work to break the cycle.

In addition, gender-based violence contributes negatively to the social determinants of health, including increased levels of poverty, housing insecurity, food insecurity, job loss and unemployment. It is one of the leading pathways for women and gender-diverse people into homelessness, and that homelessness is one of the key reasons that women return to violent situations.

When violence and housing insecurity intersect, our systems are woefully inadequate. Our homelessness sector is not equipped to deal with GBV. Much of our GBV sector is not equipped to deal with the complications of homelessness or of working with people who use substances or have complex mental health issues. Neither sector is adequately supporting members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The result is that those who are most vulnerable are often the most underserved and left with literally no safe options.

We also know that COVID-19 added further barriers to women accessing safe and appropriate supports. The important and critical public health measures of restriction and isolation have exacerbated the stressors facing those at risk of violence. This increased stress has resulted in an increased likelihood of violence within relationships at home and within intimate partnerships.

For many years, Manitoba's rates of violence against women have been the highest in the country, and they are twice the national average. We are in urgent need of significant and sustained investments in addressing gender-based violence. In order to be effective, we need intersectional approaches to violence prevention and recovery.

Currently in Manitoba, populations that are particularly underserved are indigenous people, newcomers, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ women and gender-diverse people. These are the greatest areas of need, because indigenous women are two and a half times more likely to be victims of violence than non-indigenous women. Newcomer women are more vulnerable to domestic violence due to economic dependence, language barriers and lack of knowledge about community resources. People who identify as lesbian, bisexual, trans or gender-diverse are three to four times more likely to experience intimate partner violence.

Almost all of the women we work with tell us that one of their greatest barriers in accessing supports, as well as in their desire to report, is a lack of cultural safety, yet our gender-based violence sector nationally, and especially here in Manitoba, remains woefully underfunded and has been for decades.

We urgently need to implement critical principles of harm reduction in our shelter system, but we can't until our shelters are adequately funded to have more than one or two staff working at a time to ensure safety. We need to be able to respond to the demanding need for violence recovery supports, but we can't when caseloads of GBV workers creep higher while their wages remain lower than any other essential service. We desperately need responses that go beyond the 30-day shelter stay, because when women exit without a plan that includes income and housing, returning to the cycle is often their only option.

• (1555)

We need to treat gender-based violence as the critical health crisis that it is and work to eradicate it with the commitment we would to any other health crisis.

Thank you.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Fantastic. You guys are right up and on board.

Thank you so much to our three witnesses.

We're now going to move over to questions and answers. Today we start off with a six-minute round. I'll put my finger up at five minutes, and that's just reminding the person who is questioning that they have one minute left to get a question and answer out there. At five minutes I'll be giving you a mark, and for anybody else, a minute out.

Our first round starts off with Michelle Ferreri, Marc Serré, Louise Chabot and then Leah Gazan.

Michelle, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC):** Thank you to our witnesses today. I couldn't agree more about this being a non-partisan issue. I'm happy to be on a committee where we all agree on that one, for sure.

There are lots of distressing stories coming out here, and COVID has absolutely magnified an underlying issue that we had long before this pandemic.

I'm curious about how the funding is allocated or how it would help you. What I'm hearing is there are almost two tiers. You have to manage and support these women and their children when they come to you. How much more funding do you want for prevention?

Our first story from Giulia was about that systemic trauma from the abuser. Do you feel like your shelter is in a state of sustaining and helping in the crisis mode, or would you like to do more in terms of prevention and helping, with funding?

**Mrs. Giulia Carpenter:** We are a centre that provides resources and support for our clients. We collaborate and partner with various other shelters that are here for women in Sudbury. The prevention element is having support staff there to be able to provide support for the women coming in. Due to COVID, we have to make sure we have a client coming in and working with our staff one on one, and there are some people who aren't coming in for a week or so. By having extra support staff, we could help out in those types of elements.

Some of the prevention elements would be working in collaboration with other organizations in our community and on an evaluation type of piece. If we could get some research done, that would be able to help for the future.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I'm curious if you're able to work with employers. I think that's a big barrier when you're a woman in that situation. You're talking about the increase of poverty and socio-economic issues. Do you have partners who work with you to find an employer and get them back on their feet with work?

**Mrs. Giulia Carpenter:** Yes, we work with [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] partners within our community, and we help some of our clients to get....They may not have been in the workforce for a couple of years, for whatever the reason may be, so we make sure that we have the resume support and go through the job process with them. We also help them get the training at that partner organization, as well as work within our centre with a paid program.

It is being paid through the other organizations as well as through ours, so we do a fifty-fifty on the wage and help them get the money and experience they need.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I just lost my whole train of thought there. I'm so sorry about that, guys.

I had a great question there, and it just left me. I apologize for that.

I'm going to let Laila take over for me, if that's all right.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Part of our study is studying the legislative experiences of different states and countries.

I'm going to start by asking the question to Ms. Martin from Women's Shelters Canada. On the legislative side, are there any jurisdictions we should be looking to that are perhaps doing things that are either innovative or cutting edge?

**Ms. Lise Martin:** In terms of the national action plan, we've often looked to Australia. In Australia they have recently completed their first 12-year plan. They divided it into four three-year plans in order to constantly be re-evaluating what they were doing and adding to it. Obviously, they have not eliminated gender-based violence in the 12 years, and they are in the process now of working with civil society organizations and their provincial governments to develop Australia's second national action plan.

For us, it definitely is a model, because it included civil society organizations throughout. We feel that's an important part of Canada's national action plan, to have an independent advisory council working side by side with the secretariat.

• (1605)

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Fantastic.

I was wondering if any of the other panellists had any jurisdictions we should look to or any legislative solutions that exist.

**Ms. Lise Martin:** In terms of the story that Giulia talked about, what came to mind was Clare's law. Clare's law was first adopted in Saskatchewan. It's recently been adopted in Alberta and I believe in one of the Atlantic provinces. For me, that's an example of what Canada's national action plan can do, provide the same levels of services across the country, with provincial governments coming into agreement that there be clear—

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** I don't want to interrupt, but I see the chair's pen, so I was wondering if anyone else had anything quickly to add. Otherwise we can get to that in another round.

**The Chair:** Laila, we'll have to get back to it in another round. Sorry.

We are going to pass it over to Marc Serré.

Marc, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

Thank you so much to the three witnesses.

Just your five-minute opening remarks were really detailed [Technical difficulty—Editor] set the stage for our study.

I have a question for the three witnesses, and I'll start with Lise Martin.

First, I want to thank you for the leadership of your organization in distributing the \$100-million COVID funding rapidly, within days of a fiscal year, to women's shelters. I heard a lot in my riding in Sudbury and West Nipissing on how beneficial that was. Also, I want to thank you for your support in getting the \$200 million to the shelters in a fast and expeditious way.

My question to Lise—and then I'll ask both other witnesses too—is this: When we talk about these leverages that we provided with the \$100 million and the \$200 million, how has that leveraged participation with the provinces? When we talk about core funding from the federal government and we talk about funding from the provincial government, how is that [Technical difficulty—Editor], and has the federal funding supported your member agencies in trying to look at some of those services? The flexibility is important, so I don't want to pinpoint. I want to let you leave the money open. Can you talk a bit about the criteria, how fast the money was? Is that supporting some of the provincial partners to help play a role here with the federal government, leading up to the national action plan?

**Ms. Lise Martin:** The funds were definitely flexible. It really was up to each shelter to decide. As we know, the situation varies so much from region to region across the country, so shelters were able to spend the money on PPE in the early days, on alternative accommodation, on transportation. We all know that in rural areas there's virtually no public transportation, so that can become very costly.

This is one of those situations where it differs from province to province. I can say, for example, that the Saskatchewan government did not offer any additional funding to its shelters. For Manitoba, if they did, it was minimal. Again, it's a patchwork across the country.

To my knowledge, no shelter closed during the pandemic, and the shelters have said that had this funding not been made available, that could not have happened.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Ms. Carpenter, thank you for the work you do in greater Sudbury and with the partners.

For the COVID funding and the funding you received from the federal government.... I know you received some of the human trafficking funding, close to \$400,000. How is that helping the centre but also leveraging? I heard, in Ontario, the province came to the table with the federal funding. How is that supporting you in moving forward those recommendations, going back to the national action plan?

• (1610)

**Mrs. Giulia Carpenter:** Definitely the federal funding amounts for the human trafficking, as you brought up, have given us the ability to communicate and work with other agencies in northern Ontario. We're working with six other communities with their local

coalitions, which is wonderful because we're now able to create a pathway with all of these six communities to be able to help and support women affected by human trafficking. That has definitely helped us.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Ms. Carpenter, you mentioned the support for children and the money you receive from the federal government, or some of the funding on the provincial side. What are your recommendations to look at families and children?

**Mrs. Giulia Carpenter:** We are assisting any women if they're looking into.... Like our response to the question earlier with regard to employment, we have some child care supports, so we are able to help on the children's side. We also work with a variety of different organizations that work specifically with children to offer different programming for them, so we will offer those referrals and those supports to any of the women who have children and who need them in that situation.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Ms. English, do you have any recommendations for or comments on the funding on the COVID side and the federal linkages to the provinces' core funding?

**Ms. Lorie English:** As was mentioned, we did not see a match from the provincial government here in Manitoba, so the funds that we accessed didn't come through Women's Shelters Canada. We aren't a shelter; we're a resource centre. However, we did receive funding through the Canadian Women's Foundation, specifically to respond to gender-based violence. Had that not been provided, it would have been extremely difficult for us to keep pace with the demands on our services.

What I really want to add is that a partnership between the federal government and the province is the best way forward for us to provide much-needed services beyond a 30-day shelter stay. We all know that transformation to the sector is needed in order to break the cycle of violence, and that won't come without partnerships between the federal and provincial levels of government.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** I have less than 30 seconds.

Ms. Martin, I know you're involved in the national action plan and we'll get a chance to talk a bit about that. Thank you so much for your involvement in the national action plan and looking at leveraging that 10-year span to make some systemic changes.

**The Chair:** That's awesome. Thank you so much.

We're now going to move it over to Louise.

Louise, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.



Good afternoon, everyone. I am happy to be with you today, shouldering the heavy responsibility of replacing our colleague Andréanne Larouche, the member for Shefford. Let me tell you right away what school students are told when they have a substitute teacher: be nice.

My thanks to our three witnesses.

Thank you for your testimony, ladies. We have certainly been affected by your experiences in your organizations and your situations. I congratulate everyone for their commitment. We know how important your work is. It always is important, but it is particularly so during this pandemic when we are seeing an increase in intimate partner or domestic violence, which then affects the children.

My first question is for you, Mrs. Carpenter. You gave us the example of an abuser who had three victims, three different women. That reminds us how important it is to put measures in place. We know what the problems are and it is good to explore them in detail, but it is also good to find solutions for them.

In Quebec, spousal violence has become a major issue, resulting in measures both political and legal. They include a specialized court to deal with it and tracking bracelets. This is unique to Quebec.

Let me ask you this in terms of the abusers and the women who fear them: could the federal government follow Quebec's lead by adopting similar measures?

• (1615)

[English]

**Mrs. Giulia Carpenter:** On our end of things, that would be a really... I don't know too many details with regard to the bracelets, but it may be a very interactive way to be part of that. I also overheard at the Friday meeting that there was an app in development; I can definitely see that being very beneficial for our clients, as well, enabling them to have a safe place to text.

We currently just work with partners in our community and work closely with one another to be able to link. We're part of various "end violence against women" coalitions and human trafficking coalitions, so we're trying to make those linkages and trying to partner and do the best that we can.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you.

One part of this very broad study [*technical difficulties*] deals with what is called coercive control. It manifests itself in different ways. They are all violent but, in situations of intimate partner violence, they often tragically lead to the murder of women or men. That is the issue that a number of governments have wanted to tackle in terms of prevention, before the situations that we are all too familiar with unfortunately lead to femicide. I am thinking about Australia and about various European countries, such as Spain and the United Kingdom, as you mentioned earlier, Ms. Martin.

In terms of the concept of coercion, Ms. Martin, are things being done elsewhere that we could consider and implement at federal level?

**Ms. Lise Martin:** There have been developments in the United Kingdom and a certain amount of experience has been gained. That also answers the other question about policies and about looking at other countries' experience.

The entire matter of coercive control has been studied by a parliamentary committee, and we believe that the study should be continued. Clearly, it's a major issue.

Furthermore, we currently have a campaign to show that violence is much broader, that it has a number of manifestations, of which it is important to be aware.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Okay, thank you...

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

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I was going to ask you whether you have anything else to add. However, in 20 seconds, I am just going to emphasize that, in terms of penalties for major offences, Quebec as a province cannot act alone if there is no response at federal level. That's where I wanted us to go.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm going to pass it over for six minutes to Leah Gazan.

Go ahead, Leah.

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all of the witnesses for your excellent presentations today. I wanted to start out with Ms. English.

You spoke about the need to fund it with the urgency it deserves, as we need to do for all other health crises that we're currently experiencing, and I couldn't agree with you more on that. You mentioned that in Manitoba we currently have the highest rates of violence in the country. You spoke to the desperate need to use an intersectional approach, especially with under-represented and underserved populations, including indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTQ+, newcomer communities and disability communities.

Can you explain why there is a need, and what that looks like on the ground in terms of urgency?

• (1620)

**Ms. Lorie English:** What we have seen is that typically the shelter model has been set up pretty traditionally, and not a lot has shifted, at least not in the shelter model here in Manitoba.

We often find that it underserves folks who have perhaps more complex needs. That's due in part to the fact that our shelter system is underfunded. To support people with complex mental health or substance use disorders, for example, those needs cannot be met with the current levels of staffing, based on the amount of funding shelters receive.

Also, we hear frequently from the community we serve that shelters are often ill-equipped to support women, for example, who don't have English as their first language. They don't have the knowledge or the capacity to support different cultural practices inside their shelters.

When women get there, they're often disconnected from their cultural communities. They're disconnected from their friends and families of support. The shelter staff are all they have to depend on. When those shelter staff aren't equipped to meet the needs they're presented with, women won't stay. It's one of the reasons they leave the shelter and return to violent situations. Ensuring that we have shelters that have the capacity to support people in a culturally safe way is critically important.

Another barrier we see frequently here in Manitoba is that folks who are part of a gender-diverse population—folks who are trans, non-binary or gender non-conforming—typically don't find that shelter spaces are safe environments for them, so often they will not access shelter services. What we can offer them is literally nothing. Exploring options to provide an alternative, more specialized type of shelter, I think, is critical for us in ensuring that we're meeting the needs of the folks who are the absolute most vulnerable in these situations of violence.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** My next question is actually for Ms. Martin. It's a follow-up to the comments of Ms. English.

I looked at key take-aways from your study. One of them talks about voices and the experience of people most affected at the centre, people living in rural and remote areas, indigenous people, Black people, people with disabilities, racialized people, non-binary and trans people, 2SLGBTQ+ people and migrant people. It's important to hear the voices and experiences of those people most impacted.

How does that impact actually being able to come up with one of your other key take-aways, for systemic solutions to systemic problems that already exist?

**Ms. Lise Martin:** You need to have the voices of those most impacted inform the systemic change that needs to happen. They are the ones who are falling through the cracks. You need to hear from them directly.

We have a large bureaucracy that does really good work and keeps the wheels turning, but it doesn't have its ear to the ground. Having that ear to the ground is critical to being able to inform the work that needs to happen.

It's not enough just to have a policy. For example, there are the bracelets. This is a new thing. It's starting in Quebec. It has been implemented in certain jurisdictions in a haphazard testing mode, but if the police aren't going to follow through, there's no point in having these bracelets.

That is an instance of how you need to be talking to people on the ground, those most affected, to see if your policy is actually working.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Ms. English, you talked about how gender-based violence is one of the pathways to experiencing homelessness. Can you please expand on that?

• (1625)

**Ms. Lorie English:** When women exit a shelter, if they don't exit with a plan for housing beyond that, they are likely to return to the violent situation they recently left. One of the critical pieces when considering a funding model and a sustainable pathway forward is to look at housing options connected to folks who have experienced violence. Those options can be for transitional housing or permanent housing, but without housing solutions, the cycle will continue.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We are going to go on to our second round, but I'm going to modify it a little because in 10 minutes we are going to be starting another panel.

I'm going to ask for two questions from the Conservatives, two questions from the Liberals, one question from the NDP and one question from the Bloc. This should provide us 10 minutes. I'm looking at three and a half to four minutes starting off with the CPC.

Ms. Ferreri, you have the floor.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you so much, and thanks for everyone's patience.

This question is for Lorie English. In your 2020 annual report you mentioned funding received from the federal government that helped women at risk access temporary hotel stays.

What was the dollar amount for this funding, and how was it allocated to your organization?

**Ms. Lorie English:** We received funding through the Reaching Home agreements for our housing program. Part of the intention of that funding was to house folks in a hotel who either couldn't be served by gender-based violence shelters because they had reached their capacity, particularly with reductions in capacity due to COVID-19, or weren't a good fit for shelter service.

I would have to pull up my annual report to give you an exact number, but it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$250,000 that we received. Over that time we were successful in housing over 50 women through that program.

It was out-of-the-box thinking in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that actually produced really exceptional results, and we would love to continue to see that kind of thinking used in a plan moving forward.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I think my colleague is next. Am I allowed to have a follow up to that, Chair?

**The Chair:** No. I'm afraid we don't have time.

I'm going to pass it on to Dominique.

Go ahead with your question.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Good afternoon, everyone.

I find that we are not talking a lot about boys, men, and about breaking the cycle of violence, which is so important.

In your organizations, what do you see when children witness domestic violence? What kind of continuum do you see later in the behaviour of those children, and particularly of the young boys? How do you engage with them at home or in shelters?

[*English*]

**Mrs. Giulia Carpenter:** We work with some organizations within the Sudbury community. One of the women's shelters actually provides a program for boys around the junior high age for that education piece. We also work with other organizations that work with children specifically, as well as with men. We try to provide those resources and support to each of the organizations that would be best suited for them.

We don't have a cookie-cutter plan for all of our clients. It's very customized to their needs.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

I believe it's Sonia Sidhu's turn.

Sonia, it's two questions for you guys, okay?

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us today. Thank you for your leadership in helping all women.

Ms. Martin, you said that a third of women don't report any kind of violence, and racialized women and some groups are experiencing it more highly than others in their lifetime...even though it's likely they experience it at similar rates. Can you tell us what programs or strategies you use to raise awareness of the supports available to racialized women?

You also talked about an app. That app is very good, but for the people who cannot access that or who have a language barrier, is there any strategy for them?

**Ms. Lise Martin:** Maybe Lorie can answer this as well.

Again, it's a hodgepodge across the country. In Ontario, specifically in Toronto, there are good interpretation services available. As well, in Quebec they have SOS violence conjugale. In a place like Manitoba, they're few and far between.

These are the things we want addressed through a national action plan.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** You can ask a second question.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** To any of our witnesses, the committee is looking not only at how to respond to intimate partner violence but also at the root causes. Budget 2021 announced \$55 million to help organizations increase their ability to prevent and address the root causes of gender-based violence.

From your experience, what interventions are the best at minimizing women's risk of violence early on?

**Mrs. Giulia Carpenter:** On our end, we really see the mental health aspect and the support for the children who are witnessing domestic violence in the homes. In the story I stated, he saw domestic violence in his home growing up. It's that continuation.

If we're able to create that mental health support for the kids, and any other support that they're needing, it may nip that in the bud, as you say. That will help for the future, and we can slowly see the numbers go down.

**The Chair:** Awesome. Thank you so much.

Louise, you have time for a question. I'll pass it over to you, please.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Martin, it could take 10 years for a national action plan to be put in place.

Perhaps a plan already exists in other provinces, but, in Quebec, as part of our national strategy to combat spousal or intimate partner violence, we are looking at using tracking bracelets.

Do you feel that tracking bracelets could be a short-term solution? The device could be implemented all across the country. In fact, a bill to combat spousal violence was introduced in the Senate last year.

**Ms. Lise Martin:** It is one device in a toolbox. It is one tool among others. As I said, it is very important to have everything in place. Before we start using electronic bracelets, we must ensure that the police have the training and the skills they need and that they are able to respond to the alarm signals.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** That is certainly the case in Quebec.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Leah, we're going to pass it over to you for the last question for the panel.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** My question is for Ms. English. You spoke in your presentation about the need to use harm reduction approaches when looking at the shelter system for women and gender-diverse individuals leaving intimate partner violence.

Could you speak to that? Why is there a need, and are there current gaps in the system in terms of harm reduction approaches to address this crisis?

**Ms. Lorie English:** Absolutely.

A common response to experiencing gender-based violence is increased substance use. Women cope with trauma in different ways. We also know it leads to complex mental health challenges in many people who have experienced prolonged trauma. We know that's a result of gender-based violence, yet our systems are not yet set up to support women with those complex needs.

Many of our shelters in Manitoba are funded to have one or two staff on at a time. If we have only one staff member working an overnight shift, we can't think about implementing harm reduction approaches so those vulnerable women are well served. The end result is that they have no safe places to go, and those are the ones who are most likely to be victimized again.

When we talk about harm reduction, we're not just talking about training staff and providing additional supplies and supports; we're also talking about a funding model that allows the staff to be adequately resourced so they can include harm reduction as part of their trauma response to women who are exceptionally vulnerable.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank the three witnesses today. Thank you so much to Giulia Carpenter, Lise Martin, and Lorie English for coming here and sharing with us the information on this very important study.

We are going to ask the witnesses to leave, and we will be resuming in a few moments as the new witnesses come on. If everybody could stay tuned, we'll be back up in a couple of minutes.

Thank you, witnesses, you were awesome.

• (1635) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1635)

**The Chair:** Good afternoon to all of you. Sorry we started a few minutes late, but we had votes, so we're trying to make the best of it.

Thank you so much for joining us on this important study. We're looking at violence against women, which is something on which all of you have so much information to provide.

I would like to welcome, as our second panel today, the London Abused Women's Centre and Jennifer Dunn; La Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes and Manon Monastesse; and SOS violence conjugale and Claudine Thibaudeau. Thank you so much for coming in today.

Each of the panellists will be provided five minutes for opening statements. You'll see this lovely little pen giving you a sign to wrap up in 15 seconds, and then we'll be going to our rounds of questions.

Jennifer, I'm going to start with you, for five minutes.

**Ms. Jennifer Dunn (Executive Director, London Abused Women's Centre):** I would like to thank the committee for having me here today.

My name is Jennifer Dunn, and I am the executive director of the London Abused Women's Centre.

The London Abused Women's Centre is a feminist organization located in London, Ontario, that supports and advocates for personal, social and political change directed at ending male violence against women and girls. Over the next few minutes, as I talk about our work, I will be referring to our centre as "LAWC".

LAWC is a non-residential agency that provides women and girls over the age of 12 who have been abused, assaulted, exploited and trafficked with immediate access to long-term, trauma-informed and woman-centred counselling, advocacy and support.

As I speak to you today, I am thinking about and remembering 17-year-old Vanessa Bol. LAWC honoured Vanessa during the first annual "Shine the Light on Woman Abuse" campaign in 2010. Vanessa was shot to death by Emerson Dominguez in 2003. Vanessa left behind her mother, her father, her sister and her baby. She had her whole life ahead of her, but instead it was taken from her at the hands of her ex-boyfriend, after they broke up.

During LAWC's last fiscal year, over 4,600 women and girls were provided with individual counselling and group support. This includes over 800 women and girls who reported being trafficked or who were at risk of being trafficked. During this same time, LAWC also answered over 5,000 calls for support.

LAWC would like to acknowledge the importance of this study, but would like to suggest that collectively we cannot study violence, support, protection, preventative measures, education or even international legislative experiences without identifying that the issue at the root cause of the concern in this study is men's violence against women and girls.

In nearly every province and territory, women and girls are more likely than men to be victims of physical or sexual violence. It takes an enormous amount of courage for women and girls who are being abused, assaulted or exploited to come forward for help, and when they do, the experiences that women and girls report to organizations like LAWC are often very traumatic, so much so that it can affect their cognitive abilities, leaving them in a state of being unable to properly navigate life.

Never has it been more important to listen to the voices of survivors of men's violence against women and girls about the impact of violence in their lives and about the failure of the system to address their needs. It is common that women and girls who have experienced violence will struggle with lifelong impacts. Impacts can include physical and mental health conditions such as depression, post-traumatic stress, sexually transmitted infections, absence from school or work, and social isolation.

When speaking about young women and girls specifically, patriarchal and sexist messages are taught consistently through media, online, school and even in families. The media plays a powerful role in teaching girls that their primary worth comes from being sexually desirable to men, while boys seem to learn that it is acceptable for men to have and maintain power and control over young women.

Young women aged 15 to 24 are five times more likely than women aged 25 and older to have been physically or sexually assaulted. Young women and girls between the ages of 12 and 21 are at the highest risk of being sexually exploited, groomed and lured into the sex industry, often by traffickers who are their intimate partners. That is why it is very critical to include sexual exploitation and trafficking when addressing the needs of survivors of intimate partner violence. LAWC is currently actively providing service right now—today—to 104 young women and girls under the age of 24, and the youngest girl we are providing support to right now is 13 years old.

The London Abused Women's Centre believes the work must start with the goal of shifting the social culture that normalizes men's violence against women and girls for future generations. To that end, we propose the following recommendations to the committee for the purpose of this study.

Number one is for the Government of Canada to commit to the development of legislation to end men's violence against women and girls in all of its forms. This includes amendments to the Criminal Code to identify violence against women, intimate partner violence and family violence as a specific category of offences separate and distinct from other forms of violence to better protect victims and survivors.

- (1640)

Number two is for the Government of Canada to work in collaboration with each province and with violence against women organizations to develop a national mandatory violence against women school curriculum for all levels of education, from kindergarten to high school.

Number three is for the Government of Canada to commit to ensuring that there is an appropriate level of core funding for violence against women organizations like ours that provide support.

The truth is that women and girls are at risk for no other reason than the fact that they are women and girls. We know for certain that changes in legislation, education and funding will improve supports and protection for women and girls in our country.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

I'm sorry, Jennifer; I started doing my windup. We're trying to keep everything so tight, but thank you for your awesome comments.

We're now going to pass it over to Manon Monastesse.

Manon, you have the floor for five minutes. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Manon Monastesse (Executive Director, Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

My thanks to the members of the committee for inviting the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes to appear today. My thanks also for your commitment in combatting violence against women.

The federation is made up of 37 shelters across Quebec. We shelter thousands of women and children. We also provide post-shelter services, together with external and [*technical difficulties*] services. Our community involvement includes awareness and prevention. We represent federation members at various parliamentary committees and government working groups. We are currently involved in the implementation of specialized courts in Quebec. We are working on pilot projects in 10 of Quebec's 17 administrative regions.

The government has a very strong desire to combat violence against women. It is important to emphasize that the specialized courts will hear not only cases of spousal violence, but also cases of sexual violence. This is a great innovation. It will result in a much more detailed examination of violence against women.

The Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes is the only provincial association whose members take in women, not only as the result of spousal violence, but also for family violence, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, forced marriages and so on. However, the federation's mandate is basically focused on all kinds of violence against women.

We have also worked with the Government of Quebec, which is currently reviewing family law. It wishes to include a legislative framework that recognizes and responds to spousal violence. In so doing, it recognizes the definition in the Politique d'intervention en matière de violence conjugale, which has been in existence in Quebec since 1995.

We have submitted our fifth five-year action plan, which sets out a number of recommendations in various areas such as prevention, psychosocial response or [*technical difficulties*], meaning everything related to [*technical difficulties*] spousal violence and other forms of violence.

All departments—

- (1645)

**The Chair:** I am sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Monastesse.

[*English*]

We're being advised that the sound from the interpreter keeps cutting out.

Does she need to slow down? What works best?

**Ms. Manon Monastesse:** Okay. It's because I have five minutes.

**The Chair:** Clerk, are we okay to continue?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Alexie Labelle):** The sound is cutting out in the room. We are told that on Zoom everything is okay. They're trying to work on it.

**The Chair:** I know that Leah, Sonia, Laila and Michelle are all in the room. Are they missing a lot?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** I understand French, so it's no problem for me, Madam Chair.

[English]

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I'm okay, Chair. It's not that bad.

**The Chair:** All right. We will start once again from about a sentence before you left off, if you don't mind, and your time will just continue. Thank you.

**Ms. Manon Monastesse:** I will try to slow down.

[Translation]

In Quebec, the political will takes the form of specialized courts and a review of family law in order to consider spousal violence and domestic violence when determining the best interests of children.

At the Federation, however, we know that just 35% of children are supported and seen by Youth Protection. We also know that Youth Protection recognizes the major consequences of spousal violence. Therefore, we see a national plan as extremely important. Actually, I am a former co-chair of Women's Shelters Canada, a Canada-wide network. Through our advocacy, we recognize the federal government's proactive stance in establishing a national action plan to which it will provide leadership. It will also work more closely with the provinces. That is extremely important.

Let me give you a very specific example. We know that amendments were made to the Divorce Act by means of Bill C-78. For the first time, it includes a definition of family violence, as well as measures to set better criteria with respect to the best interests of the child. So the Divorce Act is now very good, but the act is federal. Working with the provinces, the federal government can take the lead to include that aspect, for example, in Quebec's Civil Code and family law. The Government of Quebec was actually enthusiastic about the act. This shows the importance of a national action plan that prompts the provinces and the federal government to work much more closely together.

• (1650)

[English]

Is that okay?

**The Chair:** It's awesome. Thank you so much.

We're now going to move over to Claudine.

Claudine, you have the floor for five minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Claudine Thibaut (Social Worker and Clinical and Training Supervisor, SOS violence conjugale):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I am extremely grateful for your invitation. I am happy to speak to you today on behalf of SOS violence conjugale.

Let us tell you a little about ourselves. We are the main resource line for spousal violence for all of Quebec. We are available by telephone 24 hours a day, and have been for almost 35 years. We provide access to all resources and all services, whatever the need, to all who are affected by spousal violence: victims, of course, but also their loved ones, some abusers, and those who may have questions. One telephone number provides access to all the resources everywhere in Quebec.

During the pandemic, we also developed services via text and online chat. We are one of the organizations pioneering this new way to respond. We have really noticed that it helps us to reach some victims more easily, victims who do not have access to our telephone services for various reasons. This is mainly because, for some women, expressing their fears of spousal violence out loud is a step too far. Later, I will tell you about another initiative that we have instituted to make that path easier.

In our 35 years, we have responded to more than 850,000 requests. This year, we will have probably received more than 55,000 requests by March 31. This is by far the busiest year in our history. We have already reached 50,000 requests, with a month and a half still remaining.

I am going to introduce you to two initiatives that we have established in different areas, one of which is prevention. Earlier, other witnesses talked about the importance of making young people aware of the reality of violence between intimate partners. In particular, this includes the forms of violence that are more difficult to see, that are more subtle, and that do not involve physical violence. It is very important for people to be more familiar with those forms of violence, both in order to recognize them more easily when they fall victim, and in order to ask themselves questions more quickly when they may be needed.

So we developed a prevention tool for teenagers and young adults. The tool is called "It's not violent", but you can see that the "not" is crossed out. These are interactive text messages where young people are invited to take part in discussions and to put themselves in the shoes of the victims in order to help them recognize the more subtle forms of violence. The objective is also to increase young people's awareness of the reality of victims of violence, to increase their empathy for those victims, and to raise [technical difficulties] about their own personal positions against violence, in their own lives and in our society.

These interactive capsules are hugely successful in Quebec. They are now used in many school settings. There is even an online guide that lets anyone involved, even though they are not an expert in spousal violence, to lead workshops for young people. We are really very happy with them. The application was launched in 2019 and, last year, it won an American prize called the Purple Ribbon Award.

Since November 2019, the site has been visited more than 385,000 times. The reaction is extremely positive, in both educational and response circles. We are really very happy with them. We now have tools on paper to go with the online application, which is in English and French. Those tools on paper are available in French, English, Arabic, Spanish, Cree, Innu, Atikamekw and Algonquin. That is the first tool I wanted to talk to you about. I invite you to take a look at it by visiting [itsnotviolent.com](http://itsnotviolent.com).

The other tool I would like to tell you about is an interactive questionnaire exploring the realities of spousal violence. Over the years, we noticed that, when people called SOS violence conjugale, they would hang up before speaking with a counsellor. Many apologized for calling us because they were afraid they were taking the place of those who deserved our support more or whose situations were worse. But when they started to talk about their own situation, it became clear that it was often very serious and they were already experiencing forms of physical violence that could sometimes be life-threatening. We therefore developed an information and self-assessment tool for those with concerns about their relationships. It's an interactive questionnaire: people answer the questions with "yes" or "no". The questionnaire was launched at the end of November 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, and it has *[technical difficulties]*, mostly in Quebec.

• (1655)

It is available in French and in English. The questionnaire has been very successful and it gives victims very much easier access to resources.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much. This has been a fantastic panel. I'm sorry I'm having to wind you up so quickly. I just know everybody's ready to get to the questions.

I'm going to pass it over to Dominique for the first six minutes.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you, Ms. Vecchio. It's actually very useful.

I have a number of questions to ask all at once; the first ones go to you, Ms. Dunn.

You listed some recommendations. If we don't have the time to go through them all, could you provide details about them and send them to the committee?

More specifically, you said that the law must be amended to end violence against women. Could you tell us specifically what that means? You certainly provided some ideas just now, but I'd like you to tell us a little more about them.

Ms. Chabot talked about Quebec's Bill 24 and I would like to know what you think about it.

You also talked about appropriate funding. Can you put a figure to that?

I also have a question for you, Ms. Thibaudeau. You said that your telephone line also takes calls from abusers. I am very interested in knowing what exactly the abusers tell you, how you respond, and what you learn about them. I feel that we also must involve boys and men. We have to break the cycle of violence by including them in the process.

You have some very interesting initiatives, especially the "It's not violent" tool. Could you tell me about what has emerged from that very interesting tool?

Those are my questions, Ms. Dunn.

[English]

**Ms. Jennifer Dunn:** Thank you very much for your questions. I did plan on sending a brief in as well, with detailed recommendations, so I can definitely do that.

Your question to me was around the legislation to end men's violence against women. We recommend including amendments to the Criminal Code to identify violence against women specifically—violence against women, intimate partner violence and family violence.

Right now there are multiple stand-alone sections in the Criminal Code, and this really and truly does a disservice to women and girls when they are going through the criminal justice system. We believe that the separate stand-alone sections of the code need to be drawn together to really recognize the impacts of violence against women and their children, and that's what we mean by family violence as well. We feel that would better protect and provide support to victims and survivors as they go through the criminal justice system.

Did you have another question about our recommendations as well?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Yes. You said that you need core funding and that it should be increased in order to support your programming. Do you have a figure in mind? What are you thinking of when you say that it will need "appropriate funding"? At least, those were the words that the interpreter used.

• (1700)

[English]

**Ms. Jennifer Dunn:** Yes. When we talk about appropriate levels of funding, we are referring to appropriate levels of core funding. Right now, our core funding comes from the provincial government. We have funding from the federal government as well, but typically the funding that we receive on that level is in the form of funding for a certain amount of time—two years, three years, five years, depending on what it is.

Then what we have to do is answer another call for proposals, so when we're speaking about core funding, we want and need funding that is around all of the time, so we do not have to use resources to continually reapply for funding for our work to continue.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** For community organizations, especially, applying for funding requires a lot of time.

Let me go straight to Ms. Thibaudeau, so that I can make sure I don't run out of time. But I understand that you are going to send us your brief, Ms. Dunn, and we will have more details on your requests and your recommendations.

**Ms. Claudine Thibaudeau:** To answer the question about the calls from abusers, I will freely admit that it is a small minority of the calls that we receive. It's about 1% of the calls, but 1% of 50,000 is still a good number.

We are the gateway to the resources, meaning that we are not the ones who respond. So, often, when abusers contact us, we actually look at what the person needs and refer them to a resource.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Allow me to interrupt you, Ms. Thibaudeau.

Would you say that there are enough resources to which violent men can be referred?

**Ms. Claudine Thibaudeau:** That is one of our recommendations for the groups who provide resources to men who perpetrate violence. There aren't enough resources available at night, on the weekend or in the evening. Services for violent men are available weekdays, and those service providers are often busy, so they don't always answer calls from the people we refer to them when they reach out. Someone needs to be there to pick up the telephone when a victim or an abuser reaches out for help.

Yes, then, there needs to be a service for abusers available 24-7, to answer their questions, and help them move towards non-violence and question their behaviour.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Perfect, and thank you so much.

I'm now going to pass it over for six minutes to Emmanuella.

Emmanuella, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** I'll begin with thanking all of our witnesses.

[*Translation*]

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. You have given us considerable insights that will inform our study.

[*English*]

It brings us to the angle of youth and education. That's my background, so I'm going to be asking a bit about that as well.

As a teacher who has taught sex ed and ethics in Quebec high school classrooms, I always believe [*Technical difficulty-Editor*] at a young age.

I know that Ms. Dunn and Madame Thibaudeau both touched on youth and making sure we teach our young people from an early age. Could you speak a little more to that?

I know it was one of your recommendations, Ms. Dunn. I guess we'll begin with you. If you could, just say a bit more on what type of education you think would benefit kids in a classroom in order to help stop and break the cycle.

**Ms. Jennifer Dunn:** When we're talking about young women and girls specifically, they see a lot through media, online—I touched on this when I was speaking—in schools, and even with their families. Young girls are growing up learning that their worth comes from being sexually desirable to young men. Boys learn from the same outlets of media, online, school, friends and family, that it's acceptable for men to maintain power and control over women.

Really, having a national mandatory curriculum from kindergarten all the way up to high school is what we would recommend. I say national, because I think it would be very important for the provincial and federal levels of government to work together to create consistency across the country, so all children learn about the impacts of violence against women throughout their entire school career. One of the most important things is to talk about it.

To be honest with you, I have two very young children who are in grade 2, and I know I can have conversations at that age about how to treat people. I think starting from a young age is very important.

● (1705)

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

My question is for Ms. Thibaudeau. You talked about your organization's programming and the application it had recently created.

Do you work with schools and school boards? Do they know about these services?

**Ms. Claudine Thibaudeau:** We've tried to raise as much awareness of the initiative as possible in a number of ways. We are using social media and working with the education department. We hope to have as many schools as possible participate in the It's Not Violent program. The feedback from educators has been very positive.



We would often get calls from people asking us to give violence prevention workshops at schools or youth centres, through youth protection services. We can't cover all of Quebec, but we know that our shelter partners do similar work. They, too, have very limited resources, so they can't deliver hundreds of workshops a year or visit every school in the area.

That is why we decided to build a program that people could use on their own. Anyone can go to [itsnotviolent.com](http://itsnotviolent.com), where they'll find a strategy guide, as well as different animation modes, from large groups and subgroups to kiosks. The program features vignettes based on five themes: pressure to consent, isolation, sexual exploitation, geolocation and harassment. The exercise fosters conversations in which young people are asked to answer questions from the victim's standpoint. This makes it easier for them to participate, since they aren't speaking for themselves, but by putting them in the victim's shoes, we help them understand the feeling of powerlessness a victim has in dealing with her abuser, no matter what she tries.

The response to the program has been very positive. In fact, we've had a lot of interest from young boys, and that really surprised us at first. Many wrote to us to say that they had exhibited similar behaviours in the past but didn't think they constituted violence.

We think we got through [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] because that's what a lot of young people think. They are able to recognize physical violence and clear insults, but they have trouble identifying pressure, insistence and veiled threats as violence. We hear from a lot of educators who really appreciate the platform. Even though they aren't experts in the field, with this tool, they can facilitate workshops all over the province. The tool has the potential to be extremely effective.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** In one sentence, if you could, please tell us how the federal government could help organizations like yours do what they're doing?

**Ms. Claudine Thibaudeau:** Organizations like ours need time and money for these types of initiatives.

We chose to invest in this program because it's such an important issue. We have plans for other projects. Another witness brought up the idea of raising awareness among younger children, and we agree with that. We are actually thinking about a new platform to do just that. Instead of focusing on violence prevention, we plan to promote equality-based relationships and help young people define who they want to be.

Society focuses on what they want to do in life, what type of job they want. They aren't asked what type of boyfriend or girlfriend they want to be or what they want to be like as a person. The idea is to help young people define who they want to be, something society doesn't do enough of.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over to Louise Chabot.

Louise, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. My first question is for Ms. Thibaudeau.

Ms. Thibaudeau, I want to commend you on all the work you are doing with your organization in Quebec to dispel misconceptions around this issue, raise public awareness and eliminate violence in all its forms.

I looked at your website, and you have an informative page called Power and coercive control in situations of intimate partner violence. It helps readers understand what coercive control is.

Some 60% to 80% of women ask for help after experiencing intimate partner violence or coercive control. Do you think that's an issue the government should address?

• (1710)

**Ms. Claudine Thibaudeau:** Absolutely. We need a broader understanding of what constitutes intimate partner violence, which ranges from basic violent behaviour to the power dynamics in the relationship.

Intimate partner violence happens when one person in the couple uses violent behaviours to gain power they feel is legitimate. There is no denying that, in the vast majority of cases, that person is the man.

That is why we work so hard at SOS violence conjugale, always alongside sector stakeholders. We do a tremendous amount of work with shelters across Quebec. My counterpart at the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes is here; her organization also works extremely hard.

We endeavour to build tools to help people in all of those settings, and we ask victims whether those tools reflect their experiences. You brought up the SOS-Info section on our website. It contains short articles to help victims and their loved ones understand all aspects of violence, the various forms of violence and ways they can get help. We try to provide information that is as tangible as possible. The section has 20 articles, and we post new ones every year. It's another tool we use to raise awareness.

We also have a section on the website with testimonials, to help people understand intimate partner violence. The site has a more analytical component with explanatory information, in addition to the testimonials, which focus on the emotional element. An interactive questionnaire is available to users of the site, so we use various tools to help people understand what violence is. That's the hardest part.

We have received countless comments on the site, especially regarding the interactive questionnaire. People told us they never imagined that they were victims of intimate partner violence, but the questionnaire had piqued their interest. After answering yes to eight of the 25 questions, for instance, they realized that they were victims.

At the end of the questionnaire, behaviour X is categorized as emotional violence [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], behaviour Y is categorized as isolation and so forth. We help participants find the words to describe what's happening, and it is clearly having a significant impact.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I want to make sure I have time to ask you another question. Thank you, Ms. Thibaudeau.

I think we agree that the paradigm needs to change and that prevention efforts need to address the idea of coercive control.

My next question is for Ms. Monastesse, the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes representative.

You mentioned in your opening statement that your organization had published a brief on Quebec's Bill 2, which concerns family law reform in relation to parent-child relationships. In the brief, you talk about intimate partner violence and the idea of coercive control. The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights of the federal Parliament actually examined the issue. My fellow member also raised it within the committee's study.

From a criminal justice standpoint, how would including that definition [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] potentially help to prevent femicides?

**Ms. Manon Monastesse:** Beyond criminalizing intimate partner violence, we wish to see coercive control be made a criminal offence.

We work closely with our counterparts in Great Britain and Scotland. In a very short period of time—two years—the prosecution landscape for cases involving violence changed significantly. It's important to point out that coercive control is a denial of freedom, making it a violation of the fundamental rights of mainly women.

In Great Britain and Scotland, where the behaviour is now considered a crime, the number of complaints made in relation to the charge skyrocketed. As a result, women who are victims of intimate partner violence and their children are now better protected.

• (1715)

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Quebec is looking to set up a tribunal specializing in domestic violence. How do you think such a tribunal should work? Without a similar mechanism at the federal level, how can there be consistency in the approach?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The time is up on those questions. I'm going to have to move on.

Leah, I'm passing it over to you for six minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I really appreciate the discussion around kids and impacts on kids and youth and violence.

I want to ask a question specific to the child welfare system.

Cora Morgan, who is from the Manitoba First Nations Family Advocate Office, indicated in an article that was published by CBC in 2018 that, "We know that there's been a lot of women who've been missing or murdered in Winnipeg that were part of the child welfare system."

The article points specifically to a 17-year-old young woman who was found in a field outside of Winnipeg after being kicked out of a group home, and two other women who also perished in 2009 and who also were part of the child welfare system.

I ask that because we talk about impacts of family violence on children, but then the very systems that are supposed to protect children are failing them, resulting in death. Often, many young women, as we know, age out of care into being sexually exploited.

In saying that, I'm wondering—and this is specifically for Ms. Dunn—if there's been research around prevention in the way of supporting families in non-violence by keeping them together instead of separating them as a way of protecting children and families from violence.

**Ms. Jennifer Dunn:** There has been work done at our centre around that topic. I regret that I do not have an answer at my fingertips, but I would be able to provide it to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] if you would like.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you.

The reason I ask that is we know one of the impacts of colonialism has been the apprehension, whether through institutions, residential schools, child welfare or the sixties scoop, of adoptees, which has resulted in very severe impacts to families and sometimes a normalization of the violence that has been experienced in these institutions, including with young men in these institutions who often don't have support.

When we're talking about support programs for young men who are dealing with violent behaviours, I'm wondering if we are using an intersectional lens in terms of how to best assist a young man in finding alternative ways to be in the world.

I'll put that out to the panel.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Manon Monastesse:** I'd like to answer Ms. Gazan's question, if I may.

Our approach has always taken intersectionality into account. We consider the various forms of oppression that exist. A lot of research has been done on the child protection system and the challenges around the recognition of family violence [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. Simon Lapierre, a University of Ottawa professor, does work in that area.

His book *Failure to Protect* reveals the extent to which all the responsibility is placed on mothers. They have to protect their children who are being victimized, without the support of the child protection system. Unfortunately, studies also show the extent to which indigenous and immigrant women are subjected to significantly more restrictive measures, under the child protection system.

Every year, our organization puts on a breakfast for men who stand up against violence against women. For a number of years now, we've also worked with CEGEPs, speaking to young men and women about how they can be allies in combatting violence against women. We talk to young people who are studying police science, delinquent conduct, psychosocial intervention and social work, because it's important to discuss how men can be allies, both personally and professionally.

It's essential to hear from men who speak out because, thankfully, they aren't all violent. We need men who are not violent to make their collective and individual voices heard, so they can truly be role models for young men and women.

• (1720)

[English]

**The Chair:** That's fantastic.

That was the end of the first round.

We are now down to the last few minutes here at this meeting, so I'm going to mess you guys all up. We're going to do what we did last time: two questions from CPC, two from the Liberals, one from the Bloc, and one from the NDP.

I'm going to pass the floor over right now to you, Laila, for your first question.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thanks to everyone for their thoughtful presentations today.

[Translation]

Thank you everyone.

[English]

In this committee, one of the things I've been looking at is what kinds of legislative tools we have at our disposal. You have talked about some of the jurisdictions to look at. In the previous panel we were told about Australia and some of their successes. We also talked a bit about Clare's law, which has been introduced in Alberta and Saskatchewan. I'm wondering if you could provide any insight on those jurisdictions and on what we could be looking for going forward?

[Translation]

**Ms. Manon Monastesse:** We are also in contact with our counterparts in Australia, where specialized courts are more effective because they here both criminal and civil matters. [Technical difficulty—Editor] it has had quite the impact. These courts have been in place in Australia for 12 years. Not only do they foster a better understanding of domestic and family violence, but they also adopt a much more integrated approach, by simultaneously addressing both criminal and civil components. Under the system, greater support is available to victims as well as to spouses who exhibit violent behaviour.

This type of intervention is much more tailored and produces better results when it comes to rehabilitation and changes in the spouse's behaviour, given that the spouse has a responsibility to appear in court and report—

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you.

Sorry to cut you off, but I'm almost out of time. If the other witnesses could answer briefly, I would appreciate it.

[English]

**Ms. Jennifer Dunn:** I would like to suggest that it would be of the utmost importance for the federal and provincial governments to work together to create consistency across the country. That would be my best [Technical difficulty—Editor]. The results of what has happened to a woman in B.C. would be the same as the results of what has happened to a woman in Ontario—for example, what the man is potentially charged with. Therefore, it goes countrywide as opposed to there being a different story in each province or territory.

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Awesome. Thank you so much.

I'm passing it over to Jenna. You have time for two questions.

**Mrs. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.):** My thanks to the panellists today for just inspiring the knowledge that's gathered with us.

I have a question for Madame Monastesse. You mentioned the importance of the national action plan to end gender-based violence. Feel free to expand. This is a commitment that we're undertaking and that we'll be wrapping up this year, with a lot of input along the way. I'd love for you to elaborate on what you're hoping to see out of that.

[Translation]

**Ms. Manon Monastesse:** Other countries have a plan similar to Canada's national action plan on women, peace and security. In many cases, it flows from legislation.

What makes the plan so important is that it's a way for the federal government to show leadership and, as Ms. Dunn said, foster a much more consistent response across the country. By putting a national strategy in place, the federal government can better work with the provinces to ensure a response that is much more tailored to the needs of abused women and their children.

Furthermore [Technical difficulty—Editor], we know that some provinces have action plans but lack policies around specialized courts and other measures. The federal government could take a leadership role, working with the provinces to come up with a much more consistent and accessible approach Canada-wide. We feel strongly that the needs of abused women should be addressed in every part of Canada.

I referred to specialized courts, but clearly, action is required on a number of fronts. In particular, shelters should be more accessible. Quebec has 130, but Manitoba and the Northwest Territories have very few. It isn't about how large the population is; it's about what women need to be safe. Only three shelters exist in the Northwest Territories, where distance is a huge factor. In some cases, they are only accessible by plane. That is a major barrier for women who want to leave an abusive relationship.

We are very hopeful that a national strategy will address all the needs of women no matter where they are in Canada.

[English]

**The Chair:** Jenna, I'm sorry to interrupt. We have two minutes left.

I would really like a one-minute question and answer—one minute for the Bloc and one minute for the NDP, and then we'll have to wrap it up.

I'm passing it over to the Bloc. Go ahead, Louise.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Ms. Monastesse.

Specialized courts play an important role. Sometimes, governments don't wait for national standards before bringing in legislation. I want to commend Quebec on its leadership in relation to a number of domestic violence initiatives. To foster consistency, the federal government should build on those efforts.

My question is about funding, which we talked about. I would think the services that require funding fall under the umbrella of public safety. Do you think funding should be more closely tied to community organizations and the health and social services network?

• (1730)

**Ms. Manon Monastesse:** Is that question for me, Ms. Chabot?

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Yes. Go ahead, Ms. Monastesse.

**Ms. Manon Monastesse:** In Quebec, shelter funding flows solely from the department of health and social services. We believe funding should be available to organizations across Canada so they can carry out their core mission. That way, they wouldn't constantly have to turn to other departments for funding, including the justice department. We are a strong advocate of funding to support the core mission of shelters, which could apply for funding according to their needs.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much for being so quick.

Leah, you have one minute left for your questions and answers.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much, Chair.

Many of the witnesses today spoke about the importance of addressing men's violence. In Winnipeg, I'm very proud to say we have groups of young men who mentor each other. They're real local heroes, such as Mitch Bourbonniere, who mentor other men to address violence and end misogyny. A good friend of mine does that as well, Ryan Beardy.

Can you speak about the importance of supporting these initiatives, which are volunteer-led and without support, and the need to invest in programs that allow men and young men to support each other in moving towards non-violence?

[Translation]

**Ms. Claudine Thibaudeau:** I'd like to comment, if I may.

Clearly, it's important to support all initiatives aimed at combating violence, but first and foremost, victims need access to safety supports. I also think it's important to have a common definition of violence and to know what areas the response should focus on. It would then be possible to evaluate the appropriateness of funding requests to make sure that the actions of the organizations that receive funding are in line with the common definition of violence.

Quebec's policy on domestic violence intervention sets out a definition of violence, but that doesn't mean things are always straightforward. Some organizations adopt positions that go against the policy, but they still receive financial support to help victims of domestic violence. We, at SOS violence conjugale, take issue with that, as do our partners. It is our view that organizations working with victims of violence should adopt a consistent approach, in keeping with the commonly held definition of violence. I think the initiatives you mentioned are fantastic. However, for all organizations, particularly those that work with men, I would say they need to be guided by the same principles and philosophy that we are.

[English]

**The Chair:** That's fantastic.

I would like to say thank you so much to all of the panellists today. I'm looking at all of us and I know we could have you on here for more hours, because you have so much to provide.

Some information has been requested, so if there is information that we need to be sent, please send it to the clerk of the committee. She will be able to ensure we get that information.

To all of our panellists, thank you very much. To Jennifer, Manon and Claudine, it was amazing.

I remind you that our next meeting is on Friday. It will be from [Technical difficulty—Editor] meeting with DAWN Canada, RQ-CALACS, an organization grouping sexual assault help centres in Quebec; Shield of Athena Family Services; and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. We have a big lineup coming up again on Friday.

I would like to thank all the panellists.

Thank you, everybody, for working so well together.

We will see you on Friday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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