HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

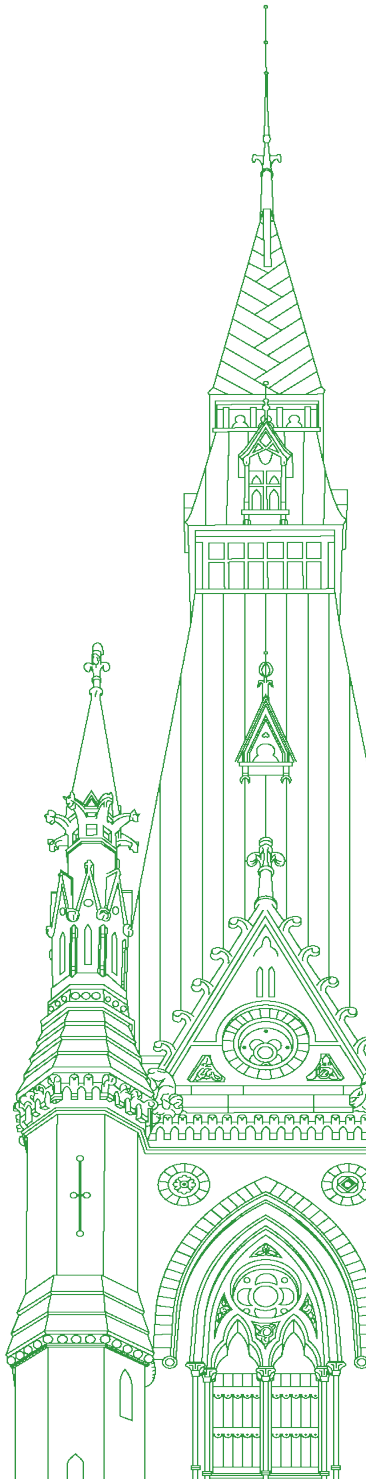
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 059

Monday, April 17, 2023



Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Monday, April 17, 2023

● (1100)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 59 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French. For those in the room, use your earpiece and your desired channel.

All comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand, and for those using the Zoom application, please use the Zoom function for that.

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informing the committee that all witnesses appearing virtually have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Tuesday, February 1, 2022, the committee will resume its study of human trafficking of women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide this trigger warning: This will be a very difficult study. We'll be discussing experiences related to abuse. This may be triggering to viewers, members or staff with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or if you need help, please advise the clerk.

Now I would like to welcome our first witnesses on our panel. I would like to welcome Staff Sergeant Robert Chrismas, who is appearing as an individual. We have Miriam Pomerleau, who is director general for Quebec of Crime Stoppers; and, from Mourani-Criminologie, we have Maria Mourani, criminologist and president.

You will also be speaking, so thank you so much.

We're going to start this off with Staff Sergeant Chrismas.

You have five minutes for your opening comments. When you see me starting to whirl my arms, please try to get it done within the next 15 seconds.

Mr. Chrismas, you go first.

Staff Sergeant Robert Chrismas (As an Individual): Thank you.

First of all, I'd like to thank all of you members of the committee for your public service. I'd like thank all members of the committee and all the witnesses for all the important work you're doing for the status of women and for trafficked women in Canada.

Where do I start? I'm having flashbacks to my three-minute thesis competition at the University of Manitoba back when I did my dissertation, but I'll see what I can touch on in five minutes, and then I'll be open to questions afterwards.

I've been in policing for 34 years. I started in recruit class in Winnipeg, Manitoba, during the aboriginal justice inquiry. In my 34 years, I've seen a lot of change, a lot of evolution in social issues and a lot of change in the way that we approach them. One unfortunate scourge that we've made some headway on but on which I think we still have a long way to go is in the trafficking of women and the exploitation of children.

When it came time to select a topic for my Ph.D. research in 2016, I thought back to my career, what I felt most passionate and challenged about and where I might be able to make the most headway, and I chose to go back to the work that I'd done in counter-exploitation 10 years prior.

In the study that I did in 2016, I tried to take a broader approach, include more voices than had been included in all of the previous research that I'd found and really go from the ground and talk to this wider selection of voices to find out what I could do to possibly, by raising their voices, make some headway on this issue. Those voices included politicians, political leaders, policy-makers, influencers, people working in government and non-government organizations, and then, of course, the most important of all, the trafficked women who trusted me with their stories to take forward. I take that as a sacred commitment to try to properly represent what they told me in venues like this.

In the end, given my short time to speak here to start off with, I want to say that I took a lot of my findings, a lot of them oriented around the structural violence and the structural oppression that a lot of women and children face in Canada that depreciate their resilience and their resistance to being caught up in the sex industry, and I boiled all of those findings and recommendations down into a table in the back of this book that I wrote with the University of Toronto Press. I'm bringing this table to your attention because I think it would be of great value to everyone on this committee to have a look at this book and the table in the back, where I've spelled out specific findings and recommendations.

● (1105)

The Chair: Can you provide us with the title of the book and the name of the author?

S/Sgt Robert Chrismas: Yes. It's *Sex Industry Slavery: Protecting Canada's Youth*. It was published in 2020.

The topics I covered and my findings around this resulted in recommendations that are tangible and specific. They're on vulnerability in the sex industry; the intersectional challenges that many women and children face, largely often due to the social conditions they're born into; the indigenous needs; intersectionality; prevention; and collaboration and coordination between agencies. I've found that there are a great many ways and opportunities for us to collaborate and get better efficiency in the systems that exist. They also include new resources, training and education, policy, and more of what's already effective.

I've brought several copies of it. I came on short notice to this hearing, but I grabbed what I had on my shelf, and I'd like to donate them to the committee. I hope some of you will look at them.

One of the largest findings that I've made is the importance of storytelling. Having done my Ph.D. on peace and conflict, I see the importance of storytelling as a tool for peacebuilding by affecting the public discourse, the public narrative and the culture of our nation around these issues. To try to further that, I've written two stories. One of them is called *The River of Tears*, with DIO Press, and another one with DIO Press is called *Dream Catcher*. I'm going to donate those to the committee. I'm hoping that some of you might have a look. It's the story of a young girl who was trafficked in the sex industry.

Finally, I want to mention a book I wrote with Dr. Laura Reimer on reconciliation in Canada: *Our Shared Future: Windows Into Canada's Reconciliation*. This was made with contributed chapters from leaders, many of whom were indigenous, on their initiatives around truth and reconciliation in Canada.

With that, I think my time is up.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to turn it over to Miriam Pomerleau.

You have the floor for five minutes. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau (Director General, Quebec, Crime Stoppers): Madam Chair, hon. members, thank you for the invitation to appear.

My name is Miriam Pomerleau and I am the Director General of Échec au crime, the Quebec counterpart of Crime Stoppers.

In carrying out its mission, Échec au crime operates a telephone service for collecting information about criminal activities, in which it protects the complete anonymity of callers who make reports. The organization is independent of police services, but it collaborates with them by providing them with criminal intelligence that helps them work toward solving cases.

Échec au crime has been in existence for 25 years in Quebec. You will understand that I am not in a position to give you statistics of the same type that a women's crisis centre or shelter could. However, our organization is a very sensitive barometer of crime trends. You can see the evidence of this in the brief I have submitted that you will be able to read later.

What is obvious is that victims of sexual exploitation are staying silent and are themselves choosing not to receive the help that the system wants to give them. They are conditioned to do this: if they talk, they die.

The most effective way to keep them in servitude is drugs. That method is used to try to alter victims' judgment so they are simply desensitized, until they become mere commodities in the sex trade. The organizers and traffickers want their prey to be fragile. When they are using, they are easy to control. Drug trafficking is therefore directly associated with human trafficking, as shown in the percentage of reports received.

The traffickers' preferred drugs are opioids and psychotropic drugs.

One that comes particularly to mind is carfentanyl, a single dose of which is 10,000 times stronger than a dose of morphine. When cut with other drugs, because traffickers don't want to kill their victims immediately, carfentanyl creates almost instantaneous dependancy. The traffickers are thus able to dominate their merchandise: the girls and women by way of whom they make their profits.

Ketamine and GHB create a dissociative state. They produce a feeling of detachment from the body and lack of awareness that allows victims to accumulate traumas. The victims are in a state in which they accept absolutely everything that may be done to them.

There are also abductions. Women and girls are kidnapped, given a fictitious identity, and forced to offer sexual services. Gradual isolation is the most common method. Young women with a history of drug use are persuaded to have sexual relations for money, to pay their drug debts. They are recruited in bars, schools, youth centres, addiction help centres, bus stations, train stations and malls.

Street gangs have come up with a new approach by using the short-term accommodations offered on Airbnb. This makes the process of marketing sex even more anonymous. The victims go to meet clients in the rented accommodations and the high degree of privacy enables the traffickers to hide in the shadows and keep the money generated by the sexual services.

Unilingual 12- to 17-year-old francophone girls from Quebec are highly prized in the rest of Canada. In Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, the demand is very strong. A lot of young women from Quebec find themselves in Ontario in a very active market, which is explained by the great ease with which the border can be crossed by land and the fact that section 65 of the Ontario Children's Law Reform Act allows young people who are aged 16 or older to withdraw from parental control.

This is a recurring problem. To eliminate it, interprovincial agreements would have to be put in place. Quebec police should have pick-up warrants that are bilingual and contain a non-compellable statement saying that they can be executed everywhere in Canada.

In its brief, Échec au crime makes two recommendations.

On March 15, the Quebec National Assembly adopted a motion stating that rape drugs are a scourge and detection tests must be made more available in hospitals and, gradually, in pharmacies. The authorities at the top levels are waking up now, in 2023, 30 years after the psychotropic drugs used to beat and rape victims and keep them in a state of submission started being illegally marketed. This is not just inexcusable; it is inadequate. The shortage of statistics about this issue is directly linked to the shortage of people who can do the testing. That motion stands as the evidence.

Alco Prevention Canada offers reliable tests in the form of bracelets and coasters for detecting GHB and ketamine, but these products must be bought; they are not free.

This explains our first recommendation: it is imperative that a massive awareness campaign be launched to require that bars, hotels, restaurants and the organizers of big outside events offer free access to GHB and ketamine detection tests. The need is glaringly obvious. This is happening now.

Our second recommendation is this.

As the mission of Échec au crime indicates, we are dedicated to public participation. Inspired by the philosophy of Truckers Against Trafficking Canada, we recommend that a program be created to fund organizations that work to develop groups composed of members of the public whose role would be to monitor the ground transportation transfer points and work with provincial and municipal governments. These organizations could offer sponsorships to large Canadian companies that provide bus and rail passenger transportation services in exchange for training sessions for the companies' drivers and personnel, to help them detect human trafficking.

● (1110)

There are tremendous numbers of people who want to make a difference, so let's give them an opportunity to do it.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much, and I'm sure we'll have lots of questions for you today as well.

I'm now going to pass it over to Maria for the next five minutes.

Maria, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Criminologist, PhD in Sociology and President, Mourani-Criminologie): Good morning, Madam Chair and hon. members. I am very happy to be with you today.

Since 2016, I have led a criminology firm that does research, designs prevention tools and offers counseling and forensic expertise services. In the area of human trafficking, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to meet with victims, but also with traffickers and pimps. This gives me a comprehensive view of the phenomenon I will be speaking to you about today. I am going to focus on trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

In Canada, human trafficking is largely an internal phenomenon. A majority of the girls who are exploited are Canadians who are moved from province to province or city to city. That is the most common form of trafficking in Canada. Nonetheless, there are obviously also non-Canadian women.

Before going more deeply into the subject during the question period, when I will be very happy to answer your questions, I would like to use the five minutes I have right now to address a few very powerful and widespread myths that somewhat obscure our vision of sexual exploitation.

One of the myths we encounter a lot these days is that the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act makes prostituted individuals criminals and makes the practice itself more dangerous. To summarize, people say that targeting the purchase of sexual services would be a bad thing. In my opinion, that is completely false.

That act, which I believe is a modern one, is based on the right to live with dignity and equality, and rests on the principle that no one may buy a human being. In reality, the act protects prostituted individuals by giving them a new status, as victims. This means that they may report a situation to the police. Unfortunately, some victims do not do that, and not because they are afraid of the police. That is another myth: people think that prostituted individuals are afraid of being treated like criminals. That is false, because this act has expressly decriminalized solicitation. Before, it was the act of solicitation that was considered to be criminal. That is no longer the case now.

In Canada at present, we have a modern law that places us in the ranks of countries that most respect human rights. Under this law, it is the pimps and "prostitutors" who are regarded as criminals.

The prostitutors are the ones who determine what will be put on the market. That is exactly the thing: it is a market that operates like all other markets, based on supply and demand. In Canada at present, the market is composed of teenagers and young adults. A majority of prostitutors are men, but we should mention that not all men use prostituted women. It is estimated that between 11% and 12% of men in the country have been to a prostituted woman at least once. So it is not all men. It is wrong to think that a lot of men do it. It is certain men who go to prostituted individuals.

These prostitutors create a market that the pimps supply for them. Here, it is a market composed of teenagers and young adults. Between the ages of 12 and 22, a person is considered to be a very good commodity. Starting at 23, 24 or 25, it's still okay, but someone over the age of 25 is considered to be too old, in the market. That is the situation in the market.

● (1115)

I will conclude by raising a very important point: we have to strengthen the law we have put in place, to enable the police to do investigations. It is extremely difficult at present to conduct investigations.

I am going to stop there, but I will have other points to discuss with you afterward.

[*English*]

The Chair: Perfect. We'll make sure that you have that opportunity. Thank you very much.

What we'll be doing is starting with a round of questions.

To anyone who heard the squeaking, I'm sorry about that. I had no idea.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): I'm sorry, Madam Chair, but the interpretation is not working now.

[*English*]

The Chair: How is it now? Can you hear me now? Fantastic.

What we'll be doing is starting our six-minute rounds of questions. We'll be going around from party to party.

We're going to start with Dominique. You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, Ms. Pomerleau and Mrs. Mourani. Good morning, Mr. Chrismas. Welcome to our committee, which is examining a subject today that is not an easy one. I will not expound on that.

Mrs. Mourani, I am happy to see you here today. You didn't have time to talk to us about investigations. I would like to give you a bit of time to explain why they are so difficult to do.

● (1120)

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I can tell you what I hear on the ground. When investigations relate to pimps, it works; the police have techniques to be able to do those investigations. However, when investigations involve prostitutors, it is extremely complicated to prove the exchange of services for money. In fact, the police will sometimes use double agents to investigate. At present, some people are even mounting challenges based on the fact that there were double agents. So the question of whether it is legitimate to use double agents is being reopened.

Essentially, it is extremely difficult to show that there was a purchase of sexual services. The police have to use double agents. They have to be able to observe a particular transaction several times, but it is very difficult to do it in massage parlours, for example, which are brothels, because the transaction takes place in a room and the owner of the establishment doesn't touch the money. The police are therefore unable to see whether money really changes hands. It is extremely complex.

As a result, we need to look at how we can give the police more tools. For that, I don't know whether it would be enough to amend the law or we should instead look into police practices. It's up to you to decide.

The other problem is that the prostituted individuals or individuals who are trapped in these systems don't know that they are protected by the law. They really think that if they make a report, they might suffer the consequences. Information in this regard is severely lacking.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: My impression is that this scourge is so widespread that I don't know what can be done to stem it.

Ms. Pomerleau, you were telling us about detection. I don't know whether I understood what you were saying correctly.

You made a connection between drug trafficking and human trafficking. If the person were not drugged, she would be more likely to have the judgment needed in order to call an organization like yours.

When you talk about detection, what are you referring to, exactly? Are you thinking about testing at major sports events, for example?

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: It means looking for the potential victim at the source, before the situation becomes extremely traumatic. We have to act in the hot spots where it is primarily happening, whether that is in hotels or in bars.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Give us an example, Ms. Pomerleau, so we can understand how it might work. Give us a scenario.

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: Think of a minor who meets someone who is going to manipulate her, for sexual purposes, very obviously, who will probably become her pimp. Often, he puts her under a yoke by pretending to become her husband. The minor becomes inherently tied to him and ceases to exist. It starts somewhere.

Detection tests have to be made available free of charge. Right now, they cost money. People don't have access to detection tests for the GHB or hard drugs that contribute to the girls being put in a state of submission. These tests are not even available in hospitals in Quebec, or availability is very limited. Drugs of this type stay in the blood for about 12 hours.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: That's not a long time.

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: So we have to do something about this.

Psychotropic drugs have been on the market for a long time. It will soon be 30 years. I don't understand why we haven't already put some thought into this, when people on the ground are suffering the consequences.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I would like to address another thing with you. We don't have a lot of time and that's a bit unfortunate.

You talked about the police's inability to do anything because of how laws and regulations apply differently from one province to another. I'm not sure that I properly understood what you were saying. I would like you to come back to that a bit and explain for us what the problem is.

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: I can clarify the situation.

Take the example of a 17-year-old girl who is in a group home, who runs away and crosses the Ontario border with her trafficker. Once they are in Ontario, even if a police officer has a pick-up warrant from the DYP to pick her up and bring her back, they can't do anything. If she is questioned there and says she is not in danger of being killed, we can't go and get her. That too makes no sense.

● (1125)

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you.

Mr. Chrismas, what do you think about the situations the other two witnesses talked about? First, they referred to women who don't dare to file a report or talk. Second, how would you answer Ms. Pomerleau regarding the inability to go and bring back a girl—because these are often girls—in another province?

What should be done? What isn't working? As parliamentarians, what can we do?

[*English*]

The Chair: Actually, you're out of time.

Mr. Chrismas, I'll give you probably 15 seconds to try to get an answer in, and then we'll switch over and hopefully some of your answers will get worked in there.

Sorry; it's 15 seconds.

S/Sgt Robert Chrismas: Can I have one minute?

The Chair: I can't give you one minute.

I know we'll get back to these questions, so, Mr. Chrismas, keep that on there. That question will come back up. I'm almost promising it.

Marc Serré, I'm passing it over to you.

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

I'll give you the one minute to respond to the question. How's that? It's no more than one minute, though.

S/Sgt Robert Chrismas: What I want to say is that I haven't been directly involved in investigations for the last couple of years.

I'm glad to see that you have a couple of police officers on the agenda who are currently doing investigations. I'd rather leave the technicalities of the investigations and the policy to them, but what I want to say about this is that in the big picture, I feel we put way too much focus on the importance of enforcement and the role that police can play and not enough emphasis on how we as a society and all the other elements can work together around these issues to improve resilience for women, to help prevent them from being taken into the sex industry in the first place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Pomerleau.

My colleague Mrs. Vien referred to the age issue. On that point, I want to make sure of something. When you talked about the age of 16, you were talking about a provincial children's law.

Do you have a recommendation to make to the federal government for enacting a law that would apply across Canada relating to the justice system?

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: Absolutely. The federal government could have the responsibility of engaging in dialogue with the provinces so these kinds of things don't happen. At present, the provinces are not talking to one another. I don't know how a mechanism could be set up to make things run more smoothly. There is plainly a lack of communication at this point, which has serious repercussions on people's lives, quite simply.

Mr. Marc Serré: In your experience, these are mainly 12- to 22-year-old girls. What role could the federal government play with the provinces, when it comes to 12- to 18-year-olds? You said we had to solve the problem at the source. What programs could be put in place in the primary, elementary or secondary schools? Do you have any recommendations to make in that regard?

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: Absolutely. The federal government would have the power to work with the provincial authorities to offer training in the schools for pre-adolescent boys on consent and how to treat women in society, in intimate relationships and sexually, whether on the Internet or in real life.

To be logical, training would also have to be offered in the schools for girls aged 12 and over where they would be told about consent, about their rights, and about the early warning signs of manipulation for sexual purposes, on the Internet and in real life.

Obviously, this training would take direct account of what young people really do on social media. It is high time the schools were given tools, because that's where it all starts.

Mr. Marc Serré: You also talked about drugs and dependancies. There is currently a pilot project in British Columbia concerning the legalization of certain drugs. Would you recommend that we consider extending measures like this so they apply in other provinces? I am thinking here about young people, because drugs seem to be a major problem when it comes to exploitation.

Do you make a direct connection between these two things?

● (1130)

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: Personally, I don't see what legalizing these drugs would accomplish, particularly in the case of the extremely hard drugs I talked about. It would be flatly unacceptable to legalize those drugs.

My position is firm: legalizing that type of drugs would amount to running head-first into a wall.

Mr. Marc Serré: Great.

Mrs. Mourani, you spoke earlier about strengthening the law or perhaps changing certain police practices.

Do you have specific recommendations to make to our committee regarding ways of strengthening the law?

Mrs. Maria Mourani: That is a very good question.

In fact, it is kind of up to you to see how you can strengthen the law in question.

I would say that the problem really lies in evidence gathering. The difficulty on the ground at present is evidence.

When it comes to the pimps, as I was saying earlier, it's fine. The police have been working on that for years. When the law changed, some time was needed to adapt before they could address the buying of sexual services and also advertising sexual services. Here again, advertising is very far down the police's list of priorities.

I think the situation is the same more or less everywhere in Canada, but I'm going to talk about Quebec. When there are minors involved, when there are criminal groups, drugs and weapons, it will be easy for the police to act. Unfortunately, it's different when it involves 18-year-old women. As I always say, though, what difference is there between 17 and 18 years old? There isn't any.

I have seen cases where the parents had asked for police help in the case of a 17-year-old minor who was going to be 18 a few months later. The police acted to get the minor out of the situation and out from under the pimp's yoke. However, the police no longer had the same power to act when the person turned 18 and said she had no problems and the pimp was her boyfriend. It's a bit like what Ms. Pomerleau was saying earlier. In a system of manipulation like that, the person ends up believing the pimp is her boyfriend. In fact, there are two scenarios: either the person is terrified or she is in love. That is why it is extremely difficult for the police in these circumstances.

In the case of the prostitutors, the ones called the clients, it is extremely difficult to prove the purchase of sexual services.

What I'm saying is that we really need to focus on prevention, starting now.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over to Andréanne. Andréanne, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the three witnesses, Mr. Chrismas, Mrs. Mourani and Ms. Pomerleau, for being here in connection with this study.

We see that human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a growing crime around the world.

Ms. Pomerleau, my first questions will be for you.

As well as being the status of women critic, I am also the gender equality critic. We often talk about the statistic that says that 96% of victims are women. In fact, you mentioned that in your brief. People talked to me about this during our mission last week. It's also a statistic that was cited during the two-day conference held in Winnipeg.

I would still like you to talk to us about the fact that this figure underestimates the number of members of the LGBTQ+ communities, and also even men, who may be included among trafficking victims. We also have to take that into account when we talk about the numbers and statistics relating to sex trafficking.

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: The official statistics say that women account for 96% of human trafficking victims, whether what's involved is sexual exploitation or forced labour. It's important to point out that for every person who comes forward, nine others do not. We agree that all we're seeing at the moment is the tip of the iceberg. That's what we're trying to sort out.

Homosexual men and others from LGBTQ+ communities definitely represent more than 4% of sexual exploitation victims. It's only logical. Complaints are much less frequent in marginal settings.

And there are fewer organizations that provide support to men in difficulty. Male victims are almost absent from census statistics but are certainly there on the ground. When their suffering is ignored, they are seriously put in harm's way.

● (1135)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Ms. Pomerleau.

As you were saying, this whole area is seriously underestimated. The figures we have now are only the tip of the iceberg. It is of course extremely difficult to obtain actual numbers on human trafficking and sexual exploitation, because they are difficult to quantify. These crimes are largely hidden, meaning that they are committed in the shadows by criminal organizations that do everything they can to sweep things under the carpet, making it difficult to find the victims of these offences.

In response to a question from my colleague on this topic, you mentioned the Internet and social media. Beyond what we've just been talking about, there is more and more discussion of an act that is in the works on hate online and in social networks. Any such act would inevitably have to address the issue of online sexual exploitation. It is in fact something I've seen in my travels: everyone says that this type of crime changed enormously during the pandemic and that it's now widespread on the web.

What can you tell us about that?

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: Since we're talking about online hate, why not go straightaway to online sexual exploitation? They're interrelated.

Whether we're talking about child pornography or human trafficking on the dark web—yes it exists—traffickers and consumers are mainly men. And they come from all levels of society; they could be businessmen, lawyers, students, construction workers or computer programmers. Demand is increasing so rapidly that it's extremely difficult to categorize the people creating the demand. What's clear is that they are men. This is clearly shown by the suspects who are arrested.

In short, it's changing very quickly.

What was your question again?

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Do you actually have any recommendations for us to ensure that the federal act also factors in the growing phenomenon of online exploitation? Right now, it's the wild west; you can say anything you want on social networks. That's also true of recruiting. It's very difficult to detect these online criminals, just as it's hard to do anything about someone who watches online violence.

What would you recommend to ensure that this act takes all that into account.

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: Everything related to hate needs to be linked to sexual exploitation, because that's what can happen as a result. It often does happen, in any event. Unfortunately, what we usually see is men exploiting women. We need to ask ourselves all kinds of questions about this.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: In this study, we've been talking a lot about prevention. We are trying to find out how we can better educate people to prevent human trafficking and sexual exploitation. It also has a lot to do with helping victims.

But how can we do a better job of detecting these sorts of crimes? I'm from the community organization side of things. In Quebec, we've talked a lot about street work and outreach. Generally speaking, do you have other recommendations on how to improve the detection of these crimes? It's all very well to work on prevention and helping victims, but how can we do a better job of identifying the perpetrators?

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: You mentioned that earlier. I think it's one of the keys to the solution.

The police are trained to respond to emergency calls and complaints. Their work is crucial.

As for sex trafficking hot spots, like massage partners, transitional apartments and red-light districts, it's important to rely on street workers' knowledge. They've been there since the 1970s. They have information and expertise that is directly related to sexual exploitation victims. I don't know why they aren't consulted more often. For god's sake, let's recruit more of them and raise their pay. I don't think they are used nearly enough.

There has been a shift in the approach being used by neighbourhood or community police, and that's a good thing.

This line of work needs to be promoted.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you so much.

We're now going to go online to Leah Gazan. Leah, you have six minutes.

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

Again, I'm sorry that I'm not there in person. I have a little bit of a cold and I thought people wouldn't really want to see me with a cold, so I decided to stay online today.

I just want to welcome everybody to the committee today.

My first question is for Maria Mourani.

In your testimony, you spoke about some of the reasons that individuals who are being trafficked—sexually exploited—might be afraid to come forward.

Part of the reason I have a little bit of a cold is that we went on this whirlwind tour, and I think my body just said that it's time to rest.

One of things you said was that part of the issue is that they misunderstand their rights and how the legislation protects them. When we were on our tour, however, we met with an organization in Halifax. They did a report and an outline of all the customers, and their breakdown showed that 50% of sex workers had customers who solicited or paid for sex who were law enforcement officers; 38.9% had customers who were professionals, such as doctors and lawyers; 27.8% had customers who were political, spiritual and cultural leaders, and 38.9% had customers who were their landlords or employers.

I share that because the very people who are supposed to be protecting women, girls and diverse-gendered individuals seem to be perpetrators themselves. Do you believe that one of the factors that prevent people coming forward is that the people they are coming forward to could be their actual customers?

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: That's a very good question, Ms. Gazan.

I've been working in this environment for years, and can tell you that people who use prostitutes come from all social classes. That's also true of prostitution with minors. The customers could be just anyone, but very often they are men in positions of power, businessmen, politicians or people working for big corporations. That's one of the reasons why they are afraid to inform.

Among other things, women tell me that they are afraid they won't be believed. They wonder what what they say will matter compared to a politician or a well-known businessman who earns billions of dollars. There were a few scandals of this kind in Quebec. The women said that they would not be believed. So the fear of not being believed is one of the reasons why they don't come forward.

Speaking of fear, one recommendation I might make to the committee is to do away with the notorious closed work permits. These are issued to young women from abroad who are supposedly required to work in places like Montreal's posh restaurants, but who end up working unwillingly in the sex trade. The so-called employers, who are really pimps disguised as restaurant owners, use these permits to keep women on a tight leash. The women don't dare to report them, because they're afraid of being sent back to their home country. They are also afraid—

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm glad you say that, because I represent Winnipeg Centre—

I'm sorry, but there's a bit of an echo.

The Chair: Maria, could you turn off your mike?

There we go. That's perfect.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay. Thank you.

I represent Winnipeg Centre, and it's actually the riding where Peter Nygard's clothing industry was built. He was a well-known sex trafficker. We know that. He's currently in jail.

I know there's a case against him in New York and certainly one in Toronto. In Winnipeg, the hub of it, even city councillors and sitting MLAs were seen with him in Barbados, but no one is pressing charges. There are no charges or cases against him in Winnipeg.

In the documentary by *The Fifth Estate*, women came forward who hadn't been believed. Are you familiar with that case? Do you have any comments on it?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I'm not aware of this particular arrangement, but I've heard a lot of evidence from victims who told me about some politicians but who didn't dare inform on them. I encouraged them to do so, but kept hearing the same refrain to the effect that their words wouldn't stand up against against these powerful men because of the lack of evidence.

I'll give you an example. When—

● (1145)

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Sorry; I'll let you finish....

What sorts of accountability measures could be put in place to oversee these men in power, like police officers, lawyers, politicians? It's horrifying. What recommendations do you have for that?

The Chair: Hold on, Maria. I will come back. We're going to be starting our next round of questions, so Leah, I'm going to have to throw that onto your second round, if you don't mind.

I'm going to now turn the floor over for our second round of questions, starting off with Michelle Ferreri for five minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thanks, Madam Chair. Thank you to our witnesses. Welcome to the status of women committee.

If I could start with you, Sergeant Chrismas, you said you have 34 years in service. Is that correct?

S/Sgt Robert Chrismas: Yes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for everything that you do, for what you've seen and for continuing to show up. Thank you for that.

I have a question for you on whether you think human trafficking is worse today than it was when you started.

S/Sgt Robert Chrismas: That's a difficult question to quantify. As was mentioned, it's so difficult to gather stats and information. It's largely a hidden crime.

I can tell you anecdotally that social conditions seem to be deteriorating in many corners. The challenges facing these populations who largely are victimized in the sex industry seem to be more up against it than in the past. It's really hard to quantify.

I can say without a doubt that in many places in Canada, especially during my experiences in Winnipeg and Manitoba, the transgenerational impacts of colonization are still continuing, if not increasing. I'd like to see more work done in that area, just trying to improve social conditions and help people become more resilient to succumbing to the challenges that they're up against socially and economically.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you. I appreciate that, and I hear the compassion in your voice. I had the privilege to do a ride-along with one of my local officers in Peterborough—Kawartha who worked in the human trafficking industry. What I've seen on the ground—and we saw this with Halifax police as well—is that there is a big culture shift to build relationships, as you've said, as opposed to enforcement. I've really seen that shift in policing agencies.

We saw higher numbers of incidents in Halifax, the highest number of human trafficking cases in a Canadian metropolis. It's interesting, because one of the big problems is in getting the data around this. One theory was that because police were progressive, because they were open and had a softer relationship, people were more apt to come and report. I think that's an interesting thing. I don't know how we would quantify that. Again, it's always a challenge.

Ms. Mourani, thank you for your testimony. I know you talked a lot about supply and demand. There is some controversy around that approach. One tool that was being used, which I saw, was LeoList. I don't know if you're familiar with that. Are you familiar with LeoList at all?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: No.

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: No. Okay. Then I'm not even going to go down that path with you.

In terms of the way we approach this, I see it as prevention through education, intervention when it's already happened, and then support. What would be your recommendations on the prevention end of things?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you very much for that question.

There are all kinds of things that could be done, but that are unfortunately not being done.

I'll take Quebec as an example, because I'm very familiar with what is done there. In Quebec, there is all kinds of prevention, in schools, and through community organizations. However, the focus is generally on what are called at-risk populations. As soon as a population is considered to be at risk, prevention efforts are made. There is also universal prevention, but on a much smaller scale.

At the moment, most of the recruitment is of people between the ages of 13 and 22 years, on social networks. Exploitation is accelerating, meaning an increase in prostitution, in terms of both recruitment and marketing.

Over 90% of young people, at least in Quebec, use at least one social network. The most popular is YouTube. TikTok and Snapchat are also very popular, as is Instagram. What's missing is prevention on social networks. At Mourani-Criminologie, we're working on a tool that would—

● (1150)

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Can I ask you a quick question, because I only have 30 seconds left?

Would you recommend legislating that social media age change to 16, or would you recommend that we use the tool we already have, social media, to educate the kids who are already on it and are going to be on it regardless?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: That's a bit of a thorny issue. I don't think that a 15-year-old should even be on social networks. My son is not on any social networks.

[*English*]

The Chair: Maria, thank you very much.

We're going to pass it over to Anita Vandenbeld. Anita, you have five minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all of you for your very useful testimony.

I want to pick up with something that Sergeant Chrismas said.

You talked about the fact that there is too much emphasis on enforcement and policing and not enough emphasis on prevention.

One thing that struck me as we've been going through this study, and particularly as we travelled last week, is the usefulness of the Criminal Code, which is essentially a dual pole—it is either legal or illegal—versus what we're hearing from survivor-oriented agencies, who are saying that this is a spectrum.

Ms. Mourani talked about the difficulty of enforcement and Ms. Pomerleau talked about the distrust.

I'd like you to comment a little bit about how we, in a society where one of the strongest tools we have—at least federally—is the Criminal Code, make that work in a reality where it is about social conditions, where we need to look at prevention, where coercion versus agency is not something that can be.... There's no clear line where one ends and the other begins.

I wonder if you could give us your thoughts and recommendations about how we move forward in that kind of a context.

I'll start with Sergeant Chrismas.

S/Sgt Robert Chrismas: To start with, there's a lot of talk about how to reduce the demand and how we affect that market, because if there's no demand, then there's ultimately no problem, right?

Further research is needed. One thing that government could potentially do is to push for further research into the fine balance between enforcement and education, which might have a bigger effect on the demand.

I know there have been john schools and some findings that they're effective, but it's unclear what level of enforcement, in combination with education, is most effective.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Madame Pomerleau, would you comment?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: I'd like to talk to you about the inflexibility of the structure. At the moment, it's blatant and can be seen everywhere. It's true of the police. The lack of communication is also obvious.

If the current structure were more flexible and brought people from various walks of life together, instead of just categorizing everything, it would change a lot of things. I'm not sure how we could go about doing that, in view of the Criminal Code, but the fact remains that the current structure is too rigid.

[*English*]

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: At the moment, there isn't much to be done in terms of the Criminal Code. The emphasis should really be on introducing the resources needed to enforce the Criminal Code, which is not currently being done. If the police were to focus their efforts on sexual services customers, a lot of men would have been taken in for questioning by now. But that's not what the figures show in terms of arrests for procuring sexual services.

Education is where the problem lies. Resources should be spent on educating potential customers. There are no resources for assisting people who go to prostitutes or for their rehabilitation, even though I don't like this term, to ensure that they stop using such services.

Prevention efforts are also required for young people. For example, I once went to a high school to give a workshop on procuring prevention. I was talking about prison sentences to a group of young people, and all they were interested in was knowing how they could get around the system. It just goes to show how empathy for others is something that has to be learned when you're very young. I told them that there could be a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison, and they were surprised. That's what they learned. I then pointed out that there was also a minimum sentence for minors. What they were interested in was how to beat the system.

Why is it like that? Because we're in a society that trivializes prostitution. It's like cancer; it eats you from inside. You could spend millions of dollars on prevention in the schools, but it wouldn't be enough.

I also spoke about prostitution to some 14-year-old girls in a number of schools. Here again, what they wanted to know was how they could earn some money. They told me that it wasn't really work. That's what they had heard.

What we need is to do is stop trivializing prostitution and change Canada's culture on this, but it's very difficult.

● (1155)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much, Maria. I can hear that passion. Wow. It's amazing.

Let's go on to Andréanne for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chrismas.

Ms. Pomerleau, I'd like to go back to what you said in your report. You mentioned places used for recruitment, like schools. One survivor did indeed talk to me about schools, but also about recruitment at sports clubs. There's a lot of talk at the moment about the importance of changing sports culture. Sports clubs can also become targeted for recruitment.

I'd like to hear what you have to say about that. I'll have a few other minor questions to ask you after that.

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: You've been talking about culture, and in doing so have zeroed in on the problem. In sports clubs and schools generally, young people are learning about sex increasingly early. I'm dumbfounded by what Ms. Mourani just said, about how young people were trying to circumvent the law, and how 14-year-old girls were looking for ways to earn some money through sex. The level of trivialization is unbelievable.

It's equally worrisome to learn that many people allow their children to open TikTok accounts when they are only seven or eight years old.

There's certainly a lot of prevention and education work to be done here.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: It's also high time for an independent study on effecting real culture change in sports.

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: I fully agree.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

When I was in Winnipeg, I happened to meet a representative of truckers who were contributing their efforts to detect sexual exploitation. She told me that it wasn't just hearsay: along their routes, truckers have actually seen sexual trafficking and exploitation.

There is another initiative at Canada's airports called #NotInMyCity. We met some representatives of Sault Ste. Marie Airport, which has just joined this initiative.

How can an initiative like this help to reveal sexual trafficking?

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: Firstly, more initiatives of this kind are needed, alongside what the police do. It's a way of having people unofficially working under cover in the field. Training should be provided to those who work at strategic points along land transportation routes. The corridor for sexual exploitation in Canada has been known for years. There should be more scouts like this working in the field, whether as expert volunteers or members of groups, to help the forces of law and order, who are short on resources at the moment. There are not enough initiatives of this kind right now, for a variety of reasons, but it would be incredibly useful to organize something like this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks so much, Miriam.

We're now turning back online for the last round of questions with Leah. Leah, you have two and a half minutes.

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

Going back to that question, could you give a very brief answer, because I only have two and a half minutes?

Madame Mourani, do you have recommendations for accountability measures that could be put in place for men in power, especially in structures like the police?

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I'll tell you what the biggest problem is, based on my analysis. I don't know whether you are aware of operation Scorpion, a major investigation carried out by the Quebec police in 2002. During this police operation, certain people testified. I'm thinking in particular of one victim who said that she had over 100 clients, including several politicians. The victim spoke to the police, but it never went to court, unfortunately. She couldn't appear as a victim for all sorts of legal considerations that I won't go into here.

In any event, the key problem is still providing evidence. When people in a position of power are involved, fear creeps in once the investigation begins. Until there is enough evidence to show that there's no reasonable doubt, it's very difficult for the police to move forward, particularly as, in Quebec, it's the attorneys who determine whether or not charges will be laid.

It's therefore difficult for me to suggest any recommendations.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Because I have limited time, I have one brief question.

We've spoken a lot about prevention factors to assist and protect women, girls and diverse-gendered folks. One of the things I've put forward is a bill for a guaranteed livable basic income as a prevention strategy for people either to not become involved in sex trafficking or sex work or to get out of it.

Very quickly, across the board, do you support a guaranteed livable basic income? We'll start at one end and go to the other.

The Chair: We'll start with you, Mr. Chrismas, and we'll work across the table.

S/Sgt Robert Chrismas: In a country like Canada, yes, I believe we should all have a basic standard of living and something that can keep people safe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Miriam Pomerleau: Who wouldn't be in favour of something like that? However, there's a lot to be done in areas like drugs and psychological distress, before opting for that solution, even though it's deeply needed.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I'm in favour of a measure for income, but believe that housing is equally important. It's an essential requirement for victims of exploitation. Unfortunately, there isn't enough housing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the three of you for coming and for being witnesses for our first hour today.

We are going to suspend for about two minutes so we can switch up the panels.

Once again, thank you very much for coming here to testify.

● (1200)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1205)

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone.

We're going to return to this meeting since we are reducing time right now.

I would like to welcome our guests for our next panel.

Here in the room, we have Mario Catenaccio, who is appearing as an individual, .

I would also like to invite Jody Miller, from EFRY Hope and Help for Women, and Peel Regional Police Constable Joy Brown of the Community Mobilization Unit. We also have available online, from the Winnipeg Police Service Counter Exploitation Unit, Sergeant Andrea Scott. You will all be starting with your opening comments.

Mario, I see you're getting your earpiece ready, but it shouldn't be hard. I'm going to give you the floor for your first five minutes of witness testimony.

Mario, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Mario Catenaccio (As an Individual): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and honourable members of the House of Commons. Thank you for inviting me to participate in these hearings.

My name is Mario Catenaccio. Although I'm appearing here as an individual and not as a representative of any government agency or organization, my knowledge and experience in this matter have been obtained from my time with the Canada Border Services Agency.

I began my career at Pearson International Airport and was on the front lines until being promoted to enforcement officer at the Greater Toronto Enforcement Centre. Ultimately I was chosen for a high-risk fugitive unit called the Immigration Task Force, also known as the ITF.

The ITF was tasked with locating individuals in Canada who were the subject of outstanding immigration warrants due to serious criminality or were wanted for serious crimes in other countries. We were also responsible for locating and arresting individuals who were deemed to be a threat to national security by CSIS after the issuance of a national security certificate was signed by the Government of Canada.

In 1999, I was chosen to participate in a multi-jurisdictional and multi-agency project known as “Project Almonzo”, which lasted approximately two years. It included officers from the Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP, the OPP, the Toronto police, Peel Regional Police and the Alcohol and Gaming Commission, to name a few.

Given that human trafficking was not widely known or recognized at the time, the project was multi-faceted and focused on the importation of foreign nationals, primarily from eastern Europe, who were forced to work in the sex trade industry, specifically in massage parlours and strip clubs. The individuals were primarily young women from eastern Europe who were brought to Canada under the pretense of working as buskers, nannies or visitors to Canada.

During the course of this project, we obtained information through our investigation and through the cultivation of confidential sources—usually those who had been arrested on previous raids—who provided intelligence in exchange for consideration on their criminal or immigration charges. Although most provided generalized information, one young lady we encountered provided specific intelligence that furthered our project. Her name was Timea Nagy, and she would ultimately live the Canadian dream by becoming a Canadian citizen, a best-selling author, an advocate for human trafficking victims and a United Nations adviser on human trafficking.

During the project and subsequent investigations, my experience is that victims of human trafficking are usually the most vulnerable individuals of our society. They are primarily young women with little to no family support. The traffickers will prey upon these women by showering them with compliments, gifts, expensive dinners and trips. Once they become dependent upon them, they will begin to introduce them to drugs and other addictions, ultimately making them completely dependent upon the trafficker. That is when they will begin to exploit them and force them into the sex trade industry.

Most victims will not voluntarily leave due to the fear of physical harm or death to them or to their immediate family members. Even those who are encountered by the police and provide evidence against the traffickers will rarely appear for the scheduled court proceedings, ultimately resulting in the charges against the traffickers being withdrawn. In my experience, one of the main reasons is the lack of funding and resources for police services and other organizations to provide housing, support and mentoring for the victims. Once they have been removed from the grip of the traffickers, most victims are, for lack of a better term, lost, and they are unable to support themselves, as they have become completely dependent upon the traffickers for food, money and companionship.

An example I can provide with respect to Timea was that she successfully opened Ontario’s first safe house for victims of human trafficking, where she would take in the victims and provide them with a home, food and mentoring to allow them to gradually return to society. It was a successful operation until the funding was no longer provided by the government.

Successful prosecutions require the active participation of the victim, which is difficult to obtain when they are left to fend for themselves after being rescued by the police.

Thank you.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that information.

We're now going to the next five minutes, which will be shared by Jody and Constable Joy Brown.

I will let you decide who's going first, but you have five minutes in total, and you're both online.

Constable Joy Brown (Community Mobilization Unit, Peel Regional Police): Thank you. I'll go first.

My name is Constable Joy Brown. I am the Peel Regional Police lead on human trafficking in the community mobilization unit. I am also the chair of the Peel Human Trafficking Service Providers Committee, whose membership includes over 40 community partners, including EFry.

Human trafficking is a priority for our service. We have 16 specialized investigators within the vice unit who are available 24-7. They are dedicated to disrupting human trafficking and helping survivors. In 2022, we laid 127 human trafficking charges in Peel, almost doubling 2018. However, according to nCourage, Peel's anti-human trafficking services hub, approximately 75% of the survivors they work with do not report to police.

In collaboration with Timea's Cause, we recently announced that all PRP frontline and investigative officers will undergo specialized survivor-led training to better identify and stop human traffickers and, more importantly, to help victims. We are the first police agency in Canada to do this. The survivor experience remains at the forefront of all of our work. We have been working with the region of Peel and community partners through the Peel Human Trafficking Service Providers Committee on regional strategy and supports, such as nCourage, which the standing committee had an opportunity to visit last week.

Peel has made significant progress and emerged as a leader in community collaboration and in identifying and delivering appropriate services and supports to those impacted by human trafficking. We have prepared a brief for the committee's consideration that outlines the need for more investments in coordinated, preventive and educational measures, as well as further investment in an anti-human trafficking housing strategy that includes emergency beds and safe, transitional and independent housing, in coordination with the provinces and region. We know this increases a survivor's well-being and recovery, decreases the likelihood of their returning to their traffickers for basic needs, and helps investigators and Crowns with access to survivors.

Finally, we strongly recommend the establishment of a national human trafficking database in order to provide access to information on offenders and victims, since human trafficking is so transient. Currently, law enforcement agencies use different tracking systems with no standardization or data-sharing mechanisms among jurisdictions.

We have provided further information in our brief.

I will now turn it over to Jody Miller, managing director of EFry Hope and Help for Women.

● (1215)

Ms. Jody Miller (Managing Director, EFRY Hope and Help for Women): Thanks, Joy.

EFry supports over 5,000 women and girls annually who are at risk of violence; many of them are survivors. Our efforts focus on prevention, support, reintegration and advocacy. Approximately two-thirds of police-reported human trafficking cases in Canada occur in Ontario, and 62% originate in the greater Toronto area, with Peel being a major corridor for this activity. It primarily impacts women and girls, with the average age of victims being between 12 and 24 years old.

Since 2012, we have provided anti-human sex trafficking programs that align with provincial and regional strategies and that focus on the national pillars of empowerment, prevention, protection and partnership. EFry develops and provides a variety of programs and workshops for schools and community partners on awareness and prevention, including a prevention program for female-identifying youth that empowers them to understand and avoid recruitment tactics, addresses social media and online safety, and creates awareness on how to access help.

We also have a program for young men that addresses the vital role males play in ending gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking.

EFry provides case management support for at-risk, exploited and trafficked individuals. As part of the nCourage hub, we provide housing for survivors through the Bonnie McPhee safe house and the Peel transitional house.

Despite Peel's attention to, and resourcing for, anti-human trafficking, we still do not have the full continuum of supports required. Supports are highly dependent on sustainable funding that goes beyond three-year cycles to ensure gaps are addressed and services maintained.

Housing continues to be a major barrier for survivors. A dedicated strategy is needed that addresses access to immediate beds, as well as independent housing and support services within housing for trauma, mental health and addiction. This is one of the most fundamental supports needed to ensure victims and survivors exit and do not return to traffickers.

Finally, human trafficking is transitory and easily disguised. Canada needs more awareness on this issue. This includes investments in prevention and awareness activities that share information on how to protect against it and where to seek help, as well as initiatives to standardize anti-human trafficking curriculums in schools. We have included further details on our recommendations in our brief.

Both Joy and I thank the committee for providing us with this opportunity to present here, and we welcome any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Back online, we have Sergeant Andrea Scott with the Winnipeg Police Service.

You have five minutes.

Sergeant Andrea Scott (Counter Exploitation Unit, Winnipeg Police Service): Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for having me.

I'm honoured to be here today to speak with you from a law enforcement perspective on this important topic. Today I want to share what we see on a daily basis in this city and across this province through a police lens. I want to share efforts we've made and the direction we're taking to combat sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

The Winnipeg Police Service missing persons unit and counter exploitation unit are a combined unit aimed at identifying and protecting those at risk of exploitation and enforcing laws associated to human trafficking. We support the national strategy to combat human trafficking and enhance prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership.

The unit receives reports of exploitation on a daily basis. Reports of exploitation range from controlling basic needs, such as food and shelter, to providing alcohol and drugs for sex acts. This is not a crime that is specific to gender, area of the city or socio-economic background. It has no barriers, and in this digital age, offenders have access to a wide range of potential victims.

Our unit is a support to frontline members and investigates reports obtained from uniformed members, tips that come from Cybertip, and calls from family members, our social agencies and child welfare partners within the community, just to name a few.

We also proactively look for potential victims, as what we know is that victims of human trafficking and exploitation do not always come forward; they need us to find them.

The counter exploitation unit also conducts proactive enforcement aimed at the exploiters or buyers of sex. These types of investigations result in numerous arrests on a regular basis. Members of the unit meet with survivors in street clothes; there are no uniforms. They explain who we are and what resources we can offer when they are ready. This is done on street corners, in hotels and in apartments across our city. Often, we simply provide a pair of mitts on a cold evening, or a care package.

Once a survivor comes forward, our unit works with them through the court process to maintain that relationship and familiarity with a consistent investigator. What we have learned is that we need to continue to build relationships with child welfare agencies, community groups and other law enforcement agencies. The more collaboration and information we share for the well-being of these youth and adults, the more success we will have. We continue to work on strong and sustainable relationships with our community partners.

Education is truly the key to success, through schools and social media platforms and as a community of adults caring for those most vulnerable in our city.

As a service, the counter exploitation unit offers training to our members and other agencies specific to human trafficking. This is a yearly course put on to teach our frontline members about best practices, investigative techniques and compassion when dealing with survivors. This year, we brought in a survivor to speak about her experience with law enforcement as a way to help frontline members understand and recognize trauma and how to appropriately handle it.

We've also recently trained members of the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service on the indicators of human trafficking. Fire and paramedics are often first on scene. Now they have additional knowledge of potential signs of trafficking.

The counter exploitation unit has also paired with the hospitality industry in the city and provided training to various hotels, again, on the indicators of human trafficking. We're also in the process of collaborating with the RCMP and other agencies on a joint enforcement project.

I also want to share some of the challenges we face. One of the biggest is the lack of a long-term addictions treatment facility in our province. The number of reported missing and exploited youth I see is extremely high. Many of these youth are vulnerable to exploitation due to their addictions. We need to be able to treat these addictions in order to stop the cycle of vulnerability leading to exploitation. We have to address the addiction crisis among youth and recognize its direct ties to exploitation if we're truly going to prevent human trafficking.

Thank you.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to get started with our round of questions. We're going to start with six minutes for Anna Roberts. You have the floor.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here.

Before I start, I want to congratulate Constable Joy Brown on your award, which I understand you mentioned. We met you last week. Congratulations on your Brampton Board of Trade Police Services Award in supporting the community.

Congratulations. I can't imagine all the wonderful work that you do for us in protecting us. Thank you.

I'm going to direct my first question to Mario. I've worked with Mario for many months now. I have a couple of questions.

One of the things we heard about last week during our travels was a lack of funding. I would like your opinion, first of all.

What do you think about seizing all the assets of these perpetrators and bringing them back into the system to help the victims?

Mr. Mario Catenaccio: I think that's something that would be very beneficial.

From my understanding now, when the funds are seized, they go back into the general government coffers. If they were directed toward helping victims reintegrate and basically get their lives back, it would be more beneficial.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: In your experience in this field, have you ever been threatened, as a police officer? I'm wondering about your protection.

Mr. Mario Catenaccio: I have. I think it was in the late nineties or early 2000s. Someone I was searching for was a fugitive from overseas and was wanted in Canada. I located him. We ended up arresting him. He was deported back to a Caribbean country. When he returned there, he called me on my personal cellphone and told me he was going to kill me. Not thinking anything of it because he was back in his own country, when I looked at the telephone number, I saw it was a local Toronto number. A few days later, he sent someone to my home, apparently to try to kill me. The RCMP did a threat assessment, and they moved me and my family out of the country for a period of time. I worked at a diplomatic posting overseas.

This was in relation to an investigation with CBSA.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: How can we protect our law enforcement and at the same time protect our victims? I think there's a lack of opportunity here that we need to address.

What would you suggest? What would your recommendation be to stop the demand and protect our victims, and of course the police?

● (1225)

Mr. Mario Catenaccio: The diverting of the funds that are seized as proceeds of crime directly to victims would be a great start. It will help victims to reintegrate themselves and get back to a normal lifestyle after they've been dependent upon their traffickers for so long.

With police officers it's a bit more difficult, because our work is dangerous in nature. However, there are things that can be done. I know, for example, that the Toronto police have a program with the Ministry of Transportation, which removes all of the police addresses from their system. It's strictly registered to the police service, so if somebody has a friend working in the Ministry of Transportation, they can't find out a home address through a licence plate or a driver's licence.

It's difficult to answer with regard to police or law enforcement, but with victims, it's something like having a safe house for them to transition back into society and employing the services of previous victims, survivors, to help them. It's no different from an alcoholic going to a program where they have people who have overcome their alcohol addiction mentoring them and speaking to them, because they can relate to what they're going through.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you.

My other question is to Constable Joy Brown.

When we were in Sault Ste. Marie, they had labels, and I believe we spoke about it when we met the department in Peel. It's great, because they have the picture of the individual, but we didn't notice it all over, just in specific areas. We also spoke to the Halifax police on how they're educating, and they're doing it as well.

Do you think a program like that right across the country, sharing information with all law enforcement from province to province, including the RCMP at all levels and the OPP and whatever, would help us to support the victims and stop the demand?

Cst Joy Brown: Yes, definitely. That's why we mentioned in our brief that having a national database where we can share information with other jurisdictions and law enforcement agencies would be very, very helpful.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Would you say that a law has to be in place to change that? I know there are privacy issues, but would you say that if we could work from province to province, it would stop the demand? Well, it can't stop the demand, but would it help to reduce the demand?

I don't think that the charges and the fines are enough to deter some of these perpetrators. Would you agree with that?

Cst Joy Brown: I would have to agree.

Stiffer fines definitely would help, but even being able to share the information from province to province, jurisdiction to jurisdiction, would be very helpful as well.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I was just told that I have 15 seconds left. I just want to thank you for being here.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: It's a hard chair up here. Thanks so much.

We're now going to move it over to Sonia Sidhu.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. You're in the hard chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for the work you are doing on the ground. I'm from Peel, and to the Peel police with all their agencies, thank you for hosting us and giving information about the reality of what's happening on the ground.

My first question is to Jody Miller.

In Peel we have a model to address human trafficking that includes a safe house, a transition house and a dedicated service hub. Can you expand on how it will be more effective with dedicated services and then how survivors can feel safe? I know we were there to see that, but can you expand on that?

Ms. Jody Miller: I can definitely talk about having these dedicated supports, as many people have talked about in a lot of presentations here. We all know that the needs of survivors are vast, and providing supports to them through one agency does not meet their needs. Really, it requires a collaborative approach to have those types of services and community come together so that it's not just one program or one service providing them.

For instance, in the nCourage hub, there's a collection of a number of agencies. There are funded agencies such as us, as well as Our Place Peel and Catholic Family Services, that provide supports and connections, but we also work with 40-plus other service agencies in our community that also provide supports and services that are accessed through the nCourage Hub so that we're able to ensure that survivors are able to come to one spot. We ensure that they do not have to tell their story multiple times and that they are able to access the support they need. That would include the houses. We do have a dedicated safe house and a transition house to support survivors.

We talked in our recommendations about the need for that full continuum, because we still do not have immediate beds for survivors who may not be ready or able to disengage from traffickers or for those who do not want to engage in intensive supports that may be associated with safe houses or transitional houses.

We need to be able to provide multiple supports as well as on the other end, when survivors are exiting these supports. They also need rent geared to income, portable housing benefits and other types of independent housing and rent supplements that help them to be able to access the housing they need instead of being put back into precarious situations where that they could be more readily victimized.

● (1230)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

My next question is to Constable Brown. I know that the Peel Regional Police has committed to training all officers on human trafficking from a survivor perspective by the end of 2023. Can you comment on how this will improve the response on the ground?

Cst Joy Brown: The survivor-led training that's provided by Timea Nagy is very comprehensive. It's three-hour training, and it talks about things that you should look at as a police officer who's on the road, different signs that you may come across that somebody could potentially be trafficked.

It goes into great detail. It's often segmented into different modules. As I said, it's quite intensive in three hours. It gives the officer an opportunity to really gain all that knowledge they would need, because oftentimes human trafficking displays itself as something else. It gives them the opportunity to take that second look and wonder if this could possibly be a situation of somebody being trafficked.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

As you're the chair of the Peel region human trafficking committee, how do you work with schools, colleges, universities and community agencies in Peel? Do you think that all levels of government, if they work collaboratively, can bring an end to the human trafficking in Canada? What do you think? Can you tell us?

Cst Joy Brown: Definitely collaboration is the key. No one agency can do this alone.

This is why we started our committee in 2015. We have been working together for a number of years, looking at opportunities to fill some of the gaps that we're seeing.

Jody spoke specifically about housing and the nCourage anti-human trafficking services hub. These are things that came out of the committee, things that we are able to write to as a committee. With the anti-human trafficking services hub, we need all of our 40-plus partners to be able to combat human trafficking.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: You were telling us in your testimony that you laid charges in 127 cases, which was double the number of the previous year, but still you think that the reports are under-reported, that victims are not reporting.

How do we encourage victims or survivors so they can get support?

Cst Joy Brown: I really think that education is the key. I believe Andrea Scott spoke about that earlier as well. That individual may not come forward, but there is an opportunity for someone to really look at the signs that somebody may be trafficked, and maybe that person is apt to come forward on their behalf.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

We're now going to pass it over for the next six minutes to Andréanne.

Andréanne, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

Mr. Catenaccio and Ms. Miller, your expertise is very interesting. Although my initial questions have mainly been for the police representatives, Ms. Brown and Ms. Scott, feel free to add anything if you wish.

In connection with this study, we've heard a lot about how the victims mistrust the system. This stood out when we heard from the first group of witnesses today. This mistrust has many consequences. Among these is the fact that victims are afraid to report incidents to the police. Exploitation remains a hidden crime. All we see is the tip of the iceberg. It's hard to get real numbers and obtain a true picture of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

I had a question in mind that I haven't asked yet, and it's related to Quebec's report on rebuilding trust, called "Rebâtir la confiance", which addresses spousal violence issues. I'd like to talk about one of the measures proposed in the report by placing it in the context of our study on human trafficking.

According to the report, victims need better protection because they don't trust the system. That being the case, could e-bracelets, which are sometimes used in certain circumstances, also be used to protect victims of human trafficking after they have reported someone? Do you think that would indicate to victims that we've heard them and are trying to protect them?

My question is for the police representatives, but the other two witnesses should also feel free to comment.

● (1235)

[*English*]

Sgt Andrea Scott: Sure, I can take that one if you want.

I'm not familiar with the e-bracelet, but I think there is definitely a benefit in providing a victim with a sense of security after they come forward.

In lots of the issues that we see, it's just the system we have to work within. We end up revictimizing our survivors again and again, because by the time they get to the court process 18 months or two years down the road, they've had to recount and tell their story four or five times, and then again be retraumatized in court. That is a huge issue with our court system in general. Our Crowns do a great job to alleviate the issues as best they can, but it's the system we have to work within. I think we need to come to a better solution.

Do victims need to be present in court? Can we go with a video statement? Do we need to retraumatize them by having them appear in person?

I think an e-bracelet would be beneficial from a security aspect, though.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Brown, do you have anything to add?

If not, I'd just like to thank you and say that it was a pleasure to meet you last week. I'd also, like my colleague, like to congratulate you on your award.

[*English*]

Cst Joy Brown: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Brown isn't answering. I don't know if that's because she has nothing to add about the e-bracelet or because she is experiencing technical problems.

[*English*]

Cst Joy Brown: Is there a translation?

The Chair: Can you hear the translation?

Cst Joy Brown: No, I'm sorry.

The Chair: Okay, we're going to suspend for a second and check in with the interpreters.

Leah, would you start speaking so that we can see if there is any translation? You're our tester.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I can hear the translation.

The Chair: I'm wondering if the interpretation has been clicked on. It's at the bottom, depending on what computer you have. When it comes to interpretation, there will be English, French or floor. If you could check there, there should be some options.

Cst Joy Brown: Thank you. I just put it on.

The Chair: You got it? Okay.

I suspended, so Andréanne, I'm going to give you that time back to ask Joy those questions.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'll briefly go over my question once again, Ms. Brown. I was saying that we've heard a lot about how victims mistrust the system. They feel that there isn't enough government action to protect them. Quebec's report on rebuilding trust, called "Rebâtir la confiance", mentions the use of e-bracelets.

I'd like to know whether e-bracelets might help victims feel they are protected from their perpetrators if they report them?

● (1240)

[*English*]

Cst Joy Brown: Definitely. I think that Andrea spoke to it as well. That, definitely, is something that would be helpful.

I want to speak to the lack of trust. I know that oftentimes traffickers will create some fear in the victim to come to law enforcement. We, here in Peel, have some wonderful community partners who have been working at this for a very long time. I know that it takes a long time to build that trust or it takes an individual numerous interactions with police in order to be able to build that trust. I think that's a very important aspect of this whole thing. Once you build that trust, it gives them the opportunity to actually come forward and report.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Ms. Brown.

I'd just like to mention in passing, given that you couldn't hear the interpretation earlier, that I, like my colleague, want to congratulate you on your award and tell you how enjoyable it was to meet you last week.

I'll move things along quickly, because I don't know how much speaking time I have left.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: In that case, we can return to this in the second round of questions. But I would nevertheless like to ask the witnesses to think about the importance of better coordinating the efforts of the various levels of government, the people working on the ground or even certain departments, to combat human trafficking and sexual exploitation. I'll ask my question in the next round.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for Sergeant Scott.

Several concerns have been raised by family members of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and 2-spirit people about the Winnipeg Police Service's failure to demonstrate being—

The Chair: Can you stop? Leah, I know this is really important for you to get on the record. Perhaps you could slow it down just to ensure that interpretation gets it.

Ms. Leah Gazan: —trauma-informed, especially in regard to press conferences and when the family is informed of a loved one being found.

As an example, Markus Chambers, chair of the Winnipeg Police Board, was quoted in The Free Press in December 2022 regarding a decision by the police not to search the Prairie Green landfill for the remains of Morgan Harris, Marcedes Myran and Buffalo Woman. He stated, "We know the Indigenous community is not satisfied with that. So, it's up to them now to reach out to the levels of government...so that it can be determined what those next steps are."

This is in spite of the fact that findings from the Winnipeg Police Service original feasibility study were disputed by forensic experts, family members, indigenous leaders and family advocates like Cambria Harris who, in the Globe and Mail article in December 6, 2022, stated, "I should not have to stand here today...and beg and beg, so that you will find and bring our loved ones home."

Lucy Beardy, sister of Linda Beardy, in response to police conduct informing her about her sister, stated in a CBC interview on April 7, 2023, that the Winnipeg Police Service "took advantage of my grief, how overwhelmed I was, my vulnerability. I feel like they betrayed the trust of the family. I felt like I was ambushed, like I was set up for this. They didn't take into account any of what I had to say, my wishes."

There have also been concerns raised about the over- and under-policing by the Winnipeg Police Service. Many have raised concerns about the shooting death of Eishia Hudson by a police officer. This brought sharp criticisms of both the Law Enforcement Review Agency, which does not have any civilian oversight, and the IIU, which is composed of former police officers.

For example, the Honourable Murray Sinclair doubts that the IIU can properly investigate incidents because it lacks both transparency and independence. Sinclair stated in a CBC interview, "I don't have a lot of faith in the Independent Investigation Unit that's in place right now to look into police officer conduct. I can't think of an instance where they've truly done a transparent thorough investigation that has convinced me...that their decision is the right one in the circumstances." He also said, "They have a vested interest in ensuring that they don't tick off the city police."

I share that because, as we know, the Honourable Murray Sinclair is probably the most beloved legal mind in the country, and Constable Joy Brown spoke about trust.

My first question for you, Sergeant Scott, is this: What are the police going to do to make sure vulnerable people are prioritized in search efforts going forward?

● (1245)

Sgt Andrea Scott: I can only speak to the operational level of what I see on a daily basis between missing persons and counter-exploitation, and I can tell you that all the reports we receive are triaged and put through our risk assessment tool. This is unique to our service. It's very beneficial in recognizing who needs our services the most, and we're able to put the resources toward the folks who we recognize are the most vulnerable within our community—

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm sorry, Sergeant.

We know, for example, that the former minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations called Winnipeg "ground zero" for murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. We know the vulnerable groups, including kids aging out of care. We also know there are places in Winnipeg that are well known in the community to be trafficking indigenous women and girls and 2-spirit people.

What intelligence do you have in place to track those locations?

Sgt Andrea Scott: A lot of the information we receive is from our frontline members, but we rely on our community partners.

We've recently paired with Bear Clan. Bear Clan has that close relationship within the community, and they're able to share information with us. There is a mistrust by community members. We recognize that, so we rely on the community members to provide that information to us in order for us to act on it.

A lot of it is also intelligence-led. We're online, we're proactive and we're looking for the exploiters of those women.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have a question in regard to Buffalo Woman. It's tragic. She is one of the three women we're searching for in the landfill. Her identity has yet to be determined.

Given the fact that we know there's a high number of human trafficking cases, I'm wondering if the Winnipeg Police Service has communicated with other jurisdictions to attempt to determine her identity. It seems like nobody in the community recognizes her clothes or has come forward. I'm wondering if the investigation is going outside the province in a concerted effort to find out who she is.

Sgt Andrea Scott: That investigation is with our homicide investigators. It would be offside for me to speak about whomever they have reached out to.

However, I know that is a practice. We often go outside of the community, in a broader sense, to reach all sorts of community members and potentially family.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

We're now going to start our five-minute round, and I'm going to pass it over to Michelle Ferreri.

Michelle, you have five minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you again to all of the witnesses for being here at the status of women committee as we look into human trafficking.

I want to start, if I can, with.... Can I call you Mario?

Mr. Mario Catenaccio: Yes.

● (1250)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Mario.

I think we were all a bit shocked when you shared the story of your own attack. I looked around the room, and there was some shock and awe that you too were at risk.

One thing we've been hearing across the board when we've been studying this is on the cost of living.

One person who works in this industry said this to me, and it really stuck: What we need to provide to victims is to replace the core need that the trafficker is providing. That is not always money; that is sometimes intimacy. It can be a whole host of things.

From a police perspective, what do you have in terms of working with another organization to help that victim go into the support mode?

As I said earlier in the other round of witnesses, I believe this is a three-pronged approach. You have prevention and intervention and then support. It's the aftermath of not getting them recirculated back into that lifestyle. It's replacing that core need that the trafficker is giving.

What do you think needs to be done there?

Mr. Mario Catenaccio: The example that I used—I believe the officer from Peel mentioned it as well, with Timea Nagy—was Timea's Cause. I'm sure there are other organizations that do similar work.

What she would do is to take that victim and build that trust and bond. As a survivor herself, she's able to relate to them. They would trust her more because of that relatability. She would help them transition from that life in which they had become dependent upon their traffickers for companionship, food, love and everything. She would transition them to the point where they could move on their own and take that first step to being independent again.

A lot of that comes down to funding from the government to help others transition to that point.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for that.

If could, I will jump to Constable Brown.

I think it was you who said that human trafficking presents as something else. Was it you who said that?

Cst Joy Brown: Yes, that was me. Oftentimes, it will present as something else.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I think that's really interesting, because the stats and the data around this are so challenging. We know there's an intersectionality here that comes with human trafficking, whether it's drugs, fraud, etc.

For the stats and the lucrative notion of what human trafficking is, if nobody had the chance to read The Globe and Mail article that featured Timea's story, I'll give you an idea of it. If the john has 40 females, then the daily profit is $36,000. The weekly profit is $252,000, and the annual profit is $13,104,000. You can quickly see how lucrative this industry is and why it is so hard to stop it.

My question to you would be, if it's presenting as something else, could we create something in that national database—which is part of your recommendation, which I think is critical—that says they were taken in on charges of fraud or drug trafficking but there was indication as well of human trafficking?

It's so hard for the victims to admit that, right? There's a lot of reluctance there.

Cst Joy Brown: Yes, definitely.

Other things it may present as are intimate partner violence or domestic violence, or even just a noise disturbance, maybe at a hotel or an Airbnb. It definitely would be an opportunity to put some information in that database, as well as missing persons. We know that oftentimes they'll go missing for periods of time. It may not present itself as maybe being grooming or human trafficking, but that's also an opportunity to enter it into that database as well.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much.

I have one final quick question.

If I can go back to Mario, we have definitely seen the historically high usage of food banks. I hear about the cost of living crisis every day from my constituents. They're people who are making good money. Parents are highly stressed. They're not able to be as present for their kids. Their kids are turning to social media. They're looking for that core need of being recognized. They're vulnerable.

Do you think there is a correlation between the cost of living crisis and the increase in human trafficking?

Mr. Mario Catenaccio: It's hard for all of us now—and a lot of us earn good wages—to survive, let alone someone who is vulnerable, who doesn't have access to those funds. It's almost as though they have nothing else to turn to, so they turn to the sex trade to try to make some more money, because it is a very lucrative business.

The Chair: Thanks so much, Mario.

We're now going to pass it over to Jenna Sudds.

Jenna, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for joining us today.

I'd like to direct my first question to Sergeant Scott.

One of the things you said that caught me was that you receive reports of exploitation on a daily basis. Perhaps this is a simplistic question, but are those calls coming in via a hotline directly to the Winnipeg Police Service, or is this via the national hotline?

Sgt Andrea Scott: These are calls that we receive on a daily basis directly to Missing Persons. We have a phone line for the public, for child welfare agencies and for our partner agencies to report youth and adults missing. That's why we're a combined unit, and the information that's gathered through that phone call shows us where there is exploitation.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Okay. Thank you.

Adding on to that, one of the things we heard during our travels across the country last week on this study was some concern about province-to-province referrals that came through on the hotline.

I'm wondering if you can speak to your experience in Winnipeg. If you are looking to support a survivor who has come forward, sometimes that means leaving the province to get away from others. We heard a bit about some challenges with getting those support services if you're going out of province.

● (1255)

Sgt Andrea Scott: We utilize our partner agencies. The Salvation Army has been phenomenal.

In one instance that I can think of off the top of the my head, we had a survivor from Ontario come into Winnipeg. Ultimately, there were charges laid against an individual, and then we were able to work with The Salvation Army to fly the survivor home. They provided that, and they provided her with some safe housing within the city in order to transition, to get healthy, and then to fly home. However, I would have to agree with Constable Brown when she said that information sharing between provinces, between agencies, is lacking.

We have a Canadian police data bank, but it looks different for every agency. There needs to be some sort of universal data bank that we can all access, because traffickers move. We often see within our city that there are traffickers from out east or out west, and if I were aware of what they're doing out west, that would definitely give me some benefit and lead to knowing what they're doing within our city, and then sharing that information with our agencies.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: That's excellent. Thank you for that.

We have heard a few times now about the importance of that consistency across the country and of being able to share information. I'm sure that will make its way into our recommendations in the report.

There's one other item I want to ask you about. You mentioned that the digital age, obviously, has changed what human trafficking looks like and how young women, in particular, are being reached.

I'm wondering if you can speak to—obviously, as that has evolved—what that means for convictions; i.e., are the laws that we currently have in place able to address the increase in the use of digital means to prosecute or to take forward charges?

Sgt Andrea Scott: In a way, there are things that are easier, because we can utilize search warrants and things like that. Once something is on the web or online on a digital platform, we can capture that, and that's good evidence to use in court. You also have platforms like Snapchat and Instagram. From a law perspective, it's very different for law enforcement to obtain user information and IP addresses. It's not easy for us. These are lengthy search warrants, and sometimes these platforms are not that easy to deal with from a law enforcement perspective.

On Instagram and things like that, things like Snapchat or LeoList, some of these chats disappear once they're opened, so it is challenging, and there are definitely challenges for us in order to obtain that information that becomes very good evidence in court.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

The next round is for two and a half minutes.

Andréanne, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I had finished saying everything I wanted to in my last round, but would like to briefly ask another question. I was talking about coordination among the various groups involved, whether departments, levels of government or even people working on the ground, like community organizations and the police. My colleagues have already asked about this, but I'll give you time to come up with other recommendations for the committee to keep in mind.

The question is for the two police representatives, and the two other witnesses. Is there anything that hasn't been mentioned yet?

If no one wants to answer that question, I'll just ask another one.

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Miller: I can address that, if you would like.

I think that it is crucial to our being able to provide the continuum of supports that are needed to address this issue. I think that all levels of government need to be working together and collaborating to address it and to be working with our communities and those who are in the community, collaboratives such as those in Peel and other communities as well that are doing that work and helping to tailor responses that work for those particular communities and the needs they have.

I feel that being able to have sustainable long-term funding in communities is essential as well, so that we don't have to rebuild these supports that we've put in place and we don't have to start over, and so that we can also provide our staff, who have been trained in providing these models and who are primarily female, with stable employment in providing these services.

● (1300)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: My next question is more specifically for Ms. Scott.

My colleague Ms. Gazan raised the question of indigenous women. One of the witnesses we heard this morning reminded us that there had been the Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which Contained 231calls for justice.

How should we go about making sure that existing reports are taken into consideration to ensure that similar situations don't recur?

[*English*]

Sgt Andrea Scott: Well, I certainly think that we're all very aware of the recommendations from the first inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. We try to implement the recommendations that were put forward to us.

As I said in my testimony, education in our schools and over social media is really the key. Sometimes it's not schools, because some of our vulnerable youth aren't going to school, so we need to get it to those kids on a different platform, like social media.

I can't stress enough the addictions piece. There is an addictions crisis in our vulnerable youth, and we need to address it in order to change the outlook.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have the next two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

Continuing on with you, Sergeant Scott, you mentioned that there is a new missing persons joint unit that has been created between the Winnipeg Police Service and the RCMP.

According to a CBC article on March 23, 2023, in Winnipeg alone, 9,315 people have gone missing. Because we don't have enough time in committee, can you please submit to the committee, out of all those cases, how many were indigenous; how many were indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people; how many were safely returned to the family; and how many HR hours were spent investigating missing cases involving indigenous people.

My last question is in response to that. Given that Manitoba now has this integrated missing persons response that has been established, I presume that there's going to be an annual report of your activities and related data. I'm hoping so. If there is, because we know that Winnipeg is ground zero for murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, will there be a specific chapter related to the ongoing crisis in our city of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls?

Sgt Andrea Scott: I just want to address that joint initiative. It's just under way; it's not in a working process right now. The funding has been announced, but we haven't got the unit together yet. There are a lot of pieces that need to come together in order to implement a joint task force.

I can tell you that the numbers that you requested are posted on the annual report on the public website for the Winnipeg Police Board, and a lot of those numbers are present and open to the public.

As for my thoughts on that integrated unit, absolutely we're going to work with triaging cases on a day-to-day basis, based on risk assessment and triage, and that's how we put the resources into place.

Ms. Leah Gazan: If you could please submit to the committee exactly what I requested, that would be very helpful. I'm looking forward to hearing if there will be an annual report just for the sake of accountability and transparency, just so that the public knows what's going on as we try to build up a more positive relationship, a more trusting relationship—certainly with the indigenous community.

Thank you.

Sgt Andrea Scott: Absolutely.

As I said, one is published in the annual report of the Winnipeg Police Board.

The Chair: Awesome.

Thank you so much. I'd really like to thank the witnesses for coming and joining us for the second panel. It's really helping us put our report together.

As Leah said, Andrea, if you could just send that information to us, that would be wonderful. I know that our clerk will be working with you to ensure that we can get that into our materials. That's excellent.

Oh, yes, we have Anna Roberts.

● (1305)

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I don't know if this is a point of order, but I needed to get your attention.

I just want to say that the analysts, the clerk, the interpreters we had last week all deserve a round of applause.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Sorry; I don't know if that's a point of order.

The Chair: That is an excellent point of order. I look at Leah and Joy. You saw how crazy we were last week, but really, you're right. I'm looking at some tired faces, because you guys have worked so darned hard.

Thank you so much to the FEWO team for making it such an incredible, impactful study and being able to get there on the ground and doing that work.

Anna, thank you very much for bringing this up. You're the best.

We'll be meeting once again on Thursday at 3:30.

Do I have a motion to adjourn? Marc's happy about that.

Great. We are adjourned.