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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1300)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number eight of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

We are getting started a few seconds late here, but I would like to thank everybody for joining us.

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

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from public health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe the following is recommended for all those attending the meeting in person. Anyone with symptoms, participate on Zoom and please do not attend. Everyone must maintain at least two metres of physical distancing, hopefully as well when they're seated. Everyone must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It's recommended in the strongest possible terms that members wear their masks at all times, including when seated. Non-medical masks, which provide better clarity over cloth masks, are available in the room.

Everyone present must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer in the room entrance. Committee rooms are cleaned before and after each meeting, but if you're switching around, if you could wipe your station as well that would be fantastic.

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we'll ensure it is properly restored before resuming the proceedings. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you're on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself.

For those in the room, your mike will be controlled by the proceedings and verification officers.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. When speaking please speak slowly and clearly, and when you are not speaking your mike should be on mute.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide this trigger warning. We will be discussing experiences related to violence and assault. This may be triggering to our viewers with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or if you need help, please advise the clerk.

I now want to welcome our first panellists. Thank you so much.

We have on our first panel today, from the Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment, Meseret Haileyesus, the executive director. From the Ending Violence Association of Canada, we have Erin Whitmore, the executive director. Finally from the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration, we have Yasmin Hussain, the manager of public education and community programs.

For our first round we'll be offering everybody five minutes for their opening comments. When you see me start doing this, please wrap it up. I will try not to cut you off, because I know this is a really important topic, but please try to keep your time within that.

I'm going to pass it over right now to the Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment.

You have five minutes. Go ahead, Meseret.

Meseret, we have a bit of an issue. Your mute button was off, but I could not hear you. What I would like to do, then, as they look at it technically, is to pass it over to the Ending Violence Association of Canada. We'll start with their five minutes first, and then we'll come back to you, Meseret, if that's okay. We'll figure out that difficulty.

I'm going to pass it over to Erin.

Erin, you have five minutes.

• (1305)

Dr. Erin Whitmore (Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of Canada): Great. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the committee for this opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Erin Whitmore. I am the executive director of the Ending Violence Association of Canada.

The Ending Violence Association of Canada is a national organization that brings together provincial and territorial gender-based violence networks and organizations from across the country to identify and implement the systemic changes necessary to end gender-based violence.

We echo the many excellent recommendations already put forward to the committee in previous sessions. We want to underline the emphasis that previous witnesses have put on the need for a whole-of-government, cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional approach to addressing gender-based violence. This approach could be accomplished through the national action plan on violence against women and gender-based violence.

As a national organization, the Ending Violence Association of Canada has the opportunity to hear from its member organizations about the similarities and disparities in services and supports across the country. We are particularly attuned to the ways in which these inconsistencies are most deeply felt by those most marginalized. As one of over 40 organizations and advocates that contributed to the development of the road map for the national action plan report, which I understand the committee has already received from Women's Shelters Canada, we want to urge the committee to promote timely action on the resourcing and implementation of the national action plan and the 100 recommendations already set out in this report.

The national action plan is more than a tool for addressing the patchwork of services that exist for survivors. It is a framework that has the potential to tackle the root causes of gender-based violence and lessen the systemic inequalities that allow gender-based violence to happen. In addition, we would like to put forward recommendations in two areas that our organization is particularly focused on.

First of all, we would like to recommend that the committee recognize sexual violence and the expertise of sexual assault support centres as an important area to include within its study on domestic and intimate partner violence. Acts of sexualized violence are one tactic of abuse occurring within the context of dating violence, domestic and intimate partner violence, and family violence.

While 30% of women report experiencing sexual assault in their lifetime, the majority of those will be victimized by someone they know. Sexual assault is the third-most reported type of violence within relationships after physical assault and threatening behaviour, and 20% of women whose intimate partners commit sexual violence against them report experiencing this violence monthly or more within the past 12 months. This is a finding that is particularly troubling given the severity of this violence.

The impacts associated with sexual violence require specialized supports and responses. However, the distinct needs of sexual violence survivors can be overlooked in broader discussions about intimate partner and domestic violence. In addition to the network of shelters and transition houses that provide vital services to survivors across the country, there is also an extensive network of community-based sexual assault centres that provide crisis and long-term counselling, prevention and education. Community-based sexual assault centres are a central part of a support system available to survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence. However, like shelters and transition houses, these organizations have long been facing funding constraints that make it increasingly difficult to meet the demand for services.

For these reasons, we would encourage the committee to include consideration of the distinct needs of sexual violence survivors, and

the organizations that support them, as part of its current and future studies.

Secondly, we would like to recommend that the committee include in its study consideration of how to better support the needs of frontline community-based anti-violence workers and volunteers within the gender-based violence sector in Canada. To illustrate this point, we have submitted a report that we produced in collaboration with one of our partner organizations, Anova, that shares the findings of a national survey we conducted in the summer of 2020 involving 376 gender-based violence workers and volunteers.

This report documents the way in which providing frontline support to survivors of violence, particularly during the pandemic, is complex and emotionally difficult work that continues to be largely undervalued. Many of those within the gender-based violence workforce continue to lack access to competitive wages, extended health care benefits, pensions and training opportunities. To be clear, this is not an oversight of organizations employing those within the sector. Rather, the precarity of this work is an extension of the chronic underfunding of the sector and the systemic devaluing of this form of labour that continues to be overwhelmingly performed by women.

Every day that we delay taking action on gender-based violence is another day that we make it even more difficult for those experiencing violence to build the lives, families and communities they want to create. We urge the committee to emphasize this need for immediate action and to stress the importance of moving beyond gathering recommendations and taking concrete steps toward implementing these recommendations.

• (1310)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're now going to turn it back over to Meseret.

Do we have everything working there, Meseret?

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus (Executive Director, Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE)): Yes.

The Chair: Fantastic.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: Good afternoon everyone.

My name is Meseret Haileyesus, executive director of the Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment.

I join you from the unceded, unsundered territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation in Ottawa. I am very honoured and pleased to join the committee this afternoon. Thank you so much for the invitation.

The Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment is the only national non-profit organization dedicated to addressing economic abuse through advocacy, education, economic empowerment and policy change. Our work is informed by up-to-date evidence and lived experience. To create systemic change, we have convened a national task force for women's economic justice. The task force is nationally represented by policy-makers, social service staff, financial institutions and community organizations advocating for policies to aid economic abuse victims.

From this task force, we have heard financial institution staff tell us that they can be the first line of defence for victims. They've told us that their clients open up to them with personal stories. Thus, they can see the first red flags of domestic violence abuse before police, shelters or lawyers are notified. However, financial institutions are missing policies and tools to be able to escalate abuse victims' files and help the victims. Financial institutions have shown their dedication to using innovative tools in combatting elder financial abuse such as flagging and escalating cases. We encourage them to replicate that process for domestic economic abuse survivors as well.

Economic abuse impacts 95% to 99% of domestic violence survivors. Economic abuse is under-reported and a hidden form of abuse often accompanied by physical, sexual and other forms of violence. Women from marginalized groups, including newcomers, refugees and racialized and indigenous women are at a higher risk of economic abuse due to systemic factors. The economic instability caused by this abuse is the top reason women cannot leave abusive relationships and the reason they often go back to the abusive relationship after separation. Survivors struggle to rebuild their lives after abusers have damaged their financial standing because abusers will take out credit card loans in the victim's name and steal and spend their money.

Last year, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCFWE conducted a national study on economic abuse in the national capital region. Our study showed that 80% to 95% of participants said that abusers engaged in actions like stealing their money or credit cards, spending their rent money, building up debt in the victim's name and threatening them if they tried to go to work. Twenty-eight per cent of women wanted to leave their partners during COVID-19 but were unable to, and 10% had left and returned due to financial constraints. Out of the list of service providers, participants also ranked financial institutions as the least helpful to them during COVID-19.

We thank the federal government for the recent initiatives in fighting gender-based violence. However, there is considerable work to be done. Our financial and legal systems are not set up to support victims, and acknowledging economic abuse as a form of domestic violence is very critical.

I would like to recommend the federal government to take the following actions to create meaningful change: Amend the federal Divorce Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code to include all forms of economic abuse—which are economic control, economic exploitation and employment sabotage—in the definition of economic violence, and remove delays in granting separation. Develop a financial abuse code of conduct for financial institutions like the United Kingdom has. Amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to support economic abuse survivors. Enhance trauma-in-

formed policies, financial codes of practice and procedures for private stakeholders such as housing, telecommunications, public transport, insurance, electric utilities, credit associations, banks and other stakeholders. Provide funding to develop educational materials. Provide funding to increase the research capacity of organizations studying economic abuse. Revise the metrics to collect economic and financial data through Statistics Canada.

Once again, I would like to thank the committee members for their interest in this important topic and, most importantly, for their leadership in bringing this conversation into public hearings.

I would be very happy to answer your questions.

Thank you so much.

• (1315)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to now move over to Yasmin.

Yasmin, you have five minutes.

Ms. Yasmin Hussain (Manager, Public Education and Community Programs, Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration): Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for the privilege and opportunity to be here with you today.

I'm joining you from London, Ontario, the traditional territories of the Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapéewak nations.

As was said, my name is Yasmin Hussain. I work in a small social service organization called the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration. MRCSSI was established in 2009 to address intimate partner violence and family violence within the diversity of London's Muslim communities.

We work closely with mainstream organizations, and our work spans the continuum of violence prevention, early intervention and critical intervention in situations of risk. Our work is really focused on providing culturally informed services and programs, and on culturally adapting existing evidence-informed programs such as the caring dads program, the strengthening families program and the healthy relationships plus programs for male and female youth that were developed at the centre for school mental health at Western University.

I'm speaking to approaches to addressing gender-based violence. Our approach is one that is culturally integrative. By that I mean that our work in prevention and intervention considers fully the socio-cultural context and experiences and intersectional vulnerabilities of the individuals and communities we serve, in particular survivors.

While there are a lot of universalities to intimate partner violence and domestic violence, there are also really clear specificities. We need to really pay attention to the social contexts that are varied and diverse. The factors and barriers that create vulnerability and risk for survivors are varied and diverse, as are the protective factors that exist in their lives. Therefore, the work of prevention in responding to intimate partner violence and domestic violence really requires multiple strategies and approaches.

I think my ask to the committee is to really continue to recognize and value the work that organizations like ours, but also many other culturally informed and grassroots organizations, do across the country in so many important ways. I think the work is really coming from a place that is trauma informed but also from a place that's building understanding and working with strengths. In our work specifically we recognize the collectivist context of family structures and community structures, and we take into consideration things like premigration trauma, migration trauma, integration stressors and racism and discrimination. I think all these intersectional vulnerabilities are part of the consideration in this work.

I do believe that prevention is key, and the work of creating safety for survivors and accountability work for those who abuse really starts and exists at the level of community, with direct work with community members, working directly and actively within communities.

Most individuals who experience intimate partner violence or family violence turn first to family members and friends before accessing formalized services, so it's important that we all have the knowledge to understand intimate partner violence, to recognize it, to name it, to recognize warning signs and to know how we can provide peer support.

How do we respond when someone discloses to us that they're being abused, or how do we recognize those warning signs?

One piece of our work is really building on peer leadership. We have a program that works with newcomers, immigrant Muslim women who are Arabic-speaking. Through this 12-week curriculum we really focus on building their knowledge of intimate partner violence and domestic abuse, to be able to name and recognize things, and equip them with capacity to provide peer support, plus provide them with knowledge and skills to sort of navigate the system, to recognize resources and to support any of their friends or loved ones who are in situations of abuse to navigate these systems as well.

My call is just to recognize that the work of addressing intimate partner violence and domestic violence will take working at many levels. It will require the involvement of multiple organizations and many people, and it will require diverse strategies. It's thinking about how we can create safety in various ways and how we can create awareness in various ways. The continued support of agen-

cies dealing with violence against women, sexual assault centres and shelters, as well as work within formal institutions and academic research, are important. Equally important is the work of building in communities, because I think that's where so much about safety starts.

Thank you so much for your time and for the opportunity to speak.

• (1320)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to have our first round of questions. Each party will get six minutes, so we'll be going around, and then we'll get to our second round.

To begin we're going to pass the floor over to Dominique Vien.

Dominique, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Good afternoon, everyone.

Ms. Whitmore, a lot has been said. One of the things you talked about was funding of the shelter network. I think I understood your point. You also talked about the state of mind of the workers in these organizations.

I would like you to come back to that, starting with the state of your network and its funding. As I understand it, shelters are funded based on the mission, but it takes you time to get funded and you're asking for more funding. Obviously, when you spend time looking for funding, it's time you don't spend with the people who need support.

Can you tell us more about this issue?

[*English*]

Dr. Erin Whitmore: Thank you very much for that question.

Yes, I was talking about the challenges and issues around funding for shelters and transition houses as well as for community-based sexual assault centres. I would add to that the many other grassroots organizations and networks that are providing support to survivors of gender-based violence across the country.

Funding is one of those challenges we really need to address because we know that supporting survivors is becoming increasingly complex. There are real challenges in accessing supports in some of the other places we may think people would go to for help. We're seeing that people who are accessing supports through shelters, through sexual assault centres and through organizations like the type that Yasmin was speaking about today often have compounding challenges. They often have mental health challenges. They're looking for housing support. They're trying to access income support. Often people working in these organizations are facing the challenge of doing all of that individual counselling support as well as helping them navigate these really complicated systems.

We know that in many ways the work that is performed in these organizations requires really specialized training. It is often very difficult. They're working with people who have had very difficult, traumatic experiences, and they are often their first point of contact. We see, though, that this work is often thought of as just helping work or supporting work. It isn't necessarily given the same sort of recognition in terms of the type of complexity that's involved.

As we found in the study that we submitted to the committee, there's also a large network of volunteers who do this really complicated work. A lot of crisis support lines that operate across the country to provide crisis support to survivors of gender-based violence are staffed by volunteers.

We need funding that is long term, flexible and allows organizations to use funding in a way that works best for them.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but my speaking time is limited.

How can the federal government offer you more support, Ms. Whitmore?

[*English*]

Dr. Erin Whitmore: I think the implementation of the national action plan is a really important step in addressing the disparities in funding. A lot of the funding that goes toward these organizations does come from provincial and territorial governments. We recognize that, but there are vast inconsistencies across the country in terms of how provincial and territorial governments administer that funding.

A national action plan at the federal level would help do that.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you very much.

Ms. Haileyesus, you talked about financial abuse. I think we don't talk enough about the young girls who are victimized. It often leads them into dark places.

Have you done any research on this? Do you have any data on the situation?

We often imagine a middle-aged woman struggling with this problem, but do you have any data on young girls, since our study today is also looking at intimate relationships between teenagers?

[*English*]

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: In terms of the research, unfortunately there is limited data in Canada, not only for young girls but for all community members. Right now, my organization is conducting a national study to identify and see the prevalence. We also want to explore what the services and opportunities are for victims and survivors of economic abuse.

There is a study out, which I shared with you in my statement, that was conducted during COVID-19, but only in Ottawa. Hopefully, we will continue conducting more studies, but we need more resources and support. Of course, we also need some more funding.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to turn to Anita Vandenberg.

You have six minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much. I want to thank all of our witnesses, not just for your testimony today but also for the incredibly important work that you do.

I'm going to be directing most of my questions to the Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment. I'm incredibly happy to see you here, Ms. Haileyesus. The work that you've done is incredibly... It's avant-garde. It is work that really hasn't been documented, although anecdotally a lot of women understand that economic abuse and financial abuse are very much a part of the control and the abusive situation. It's something that needs more research, as you said.

My question to you is a bit cliché. It's "he didn't hit you, did he?" or that you can't see the abuse. That's hard enough when it comes to psychological, emotional and sexual abuse, but when it comes to economic abuse, there are many circumstances where that might seem normalized. He controls the finances, or it might not seem so bad that he's grabbed the credit card to go out shopping. It can happen to very strong women, including women who are employed, who one would think would recognize it. There's an issue in terms of identifying that as a form of abuse.

Why is it so important that we get the data and that we have this national advocacy on economic abuse? It can be stand-alone as well, although as you mentioned, it almost always accompanies other forms of abuse.

Why is it so important that we do this advocacy to ensure that people, women, who are experiencing it and are in that situation will know that it is a form of abuse?

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: In terms of data, it is very important to share public policy and for women to understand the issue.

Unfortunately, one of our challenges is that women don't know about financial and economic abuse, because of its nature and complexity. Service care providers don't have a lot of resources to identify and tackle this form of violence. Data is very essential. As I said, we are conducting national research right now. Hopefully, that research will help us.

Beyond that, data helps us develop different screening tools. Right now, my organization is developing and adopting an economic abuse screening tool for lawyers, frontline workers and service providers. I hope this is also very important in our advocacy.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: You mentioned that there might be particular marginalized groups that might be more prone to this. I'd be interested in knowing which they are, not just in terms of, perhaps, newcomers or others but also in age. I can certainly tell you that, in many families of my parent's generation, it was very normal that the man controlled the finances.

Are there particular groups that you're seeing, at least anecdotally, in the research you've done so far that are particularly vulnerable to this? Does this impact self-reporting? We know, for instance... Statistics Canada said that racialized women are less likely to face abuse than white women. We know that is almost certainly a case of a lack of self-reporting.

How would that impact communities in which it may be normalized that women don't handle the money?

• (1330)

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: In terms of vulnerability, from our experience and from our day-to-day work, Black and indigenous women are highly impacted, especially indigenous women who are aged above 15. That's what we have seen.

Unfortunately, our pension law and our pension system don't help them. As you know, your income support is sometimes not considered as income, especially if you have spousal support. That also affects women in many ways.

In terms of the other aspect you mentioned, it's definitely very intersectional. It affects everyone, regardless of their socio-economic status, education status, race or gender. We definitely need to work and continue moving forward. Hopefully, we will come up with some best practices and also will adopt them from many other countries.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: You mentioned, of course, that economic abuse makes it very hard for the person to leave the relationship, but you said something briefly about it continuing long after. For instance, physical violence can often end when the person starts their new life, but economic abuse, the credit ratings, high debt loads and those sorts of things, can carry on much longer for women. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: Exactly. The nature of this form of abuse is that it continues after separation. It doesn't rely on physical proximity. When they leave women in those abusive situations, perpetrators deliberately hold and control economic resources. Those

economic resources could be credit, debt, assets or any kind of property under the spouse's name.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of systems that support survivors in between, so that traps them and then survivors start to struggle to rebuild their lives. As you know, even to simply get an apartment, every landlord wants to check your credit history. Most survivors are not eligible to get an apartment. If they want to access legal services, unfortunately some of them are not eligible because of the joint assets. Even to freeze their assets, they need to hire a lawyer. That's the system out there.

In order to go back to school, definitely you need to have a good credit history, including for OSAP. That's what we have seen. Unfortunately, survivors are not able to go back to school, so they are not able to access housing, the justice system and basic needs. You also can imagine the [*Inaudible—Editor*] how it's layered.

When you see the continuum, this kind of violence is faced by a woman for more than 25 years. That's the statistics and that's also the research we found.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Again, I thank all three witnesses for their testimony. I thank them for taking the time to come and enlighten us today.

I would like to direct my first question to Ms. Haileyesus, from the Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment.

Ms. Haileyesus, one of the mandates of your organization is to advocate for government recognition of financial abuse; you spoke eloquently about it in your earlier testimony. You also mentioned coercive control, and raising awareness about financial abuse in the context of domestic violence.

Can you tell us more about what you are proposing to the federal government regarding coercive control, which is one of the topics of our study?

[English]

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: Thank you so much for this important question. We expect the federal government to amend the Divorce Act. That's our advocacy. We presented that, of course, in our petition the last time for the House. Unfortunately, because of the federal election, we were not successful.

The Divorce Act has to be amended to include the three forms of abuse, which are economic control, economic exploitation and employment sabotage. It has to be clearly articulated. From the justice system as well we need to have policies and practices that really help non-profit organizations and support services so that they can address this easily and support women. This is our advocacy.

So far, close to 27 cities across Canada have proclaimed November 26 as Economic Abuse Awareness Day. This year we also had an international campaign to raise awareness, not only for survivors but also for policy-makers, researchers and also any advocates in this field. We'll continue advocating in collaboration with our national task force and also many stakeholders.

This is our advocacy work. Right now we are advocating for financial institutions to develop a financial code of practice to protect survivors. We have a voluntary code of practice for elder financial abuse, so we want to replicate that advocacy and that code of conduct to protect against financial and economic abuse. It's an ongoing process, so we definitely need support from the federal government moving forward.

• (1335)

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much.

Ms. Haileyesus, you spoke at length about financial crimes, but in terms of criminal justice, how do you think adding a clearer definition of coercive control to the Criminal Code would prevent more spousal abuse and femicides? This definition currently lacks clarity.

I would also like to address Ms. Whitmore, who raised the issue of specialized support. In Quebec, right now, the Ministry of Public Security is doing a study on specialized courts. Obviously, changes will have to be made to the Criminal Code. Tracking bracelets are also being studied. The federal government will have to make the appropriate changes to the Criminal Code.

So I would like to hear from Ms. Haileyesus or Ms. Whitmore on this, or even Ms. Hussain, if she wants to add something.

[English]

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: I can probably answer the first question.

Definitely yes, if we could make coercive control an offence, definitely it would really help women. Economic abuse is a behaviour that is in line with coercive control. I think that's very helpful, so we'll continue advocating.

Maybe I will leave the second question for Erin. I'm not a lawyer, but this is my observation and opinion.

Dr. Erin Whitmore: Thank you very much.

Some of these initiatives related to making changes in the Criminal Code and implementing various legislation are potentially important tools that can provide supports to some survivors. Certainly we're looking forward to seeing some of the work that's taking place in Quebec around the specialized sexual violence courts.

I think, though, that when we're talking about criminal justice reforms, we really do have to also make sure that any type of legislative change is informed by input from survivors and anti-violence workers. We must make sure it is accompanied by resourcing that will allow for the training that will be necessary for law enforcement officials and the actors in the criminal justice system to make sure these initiatives can actually be implemented in a meaningful way.

I'll just make one final point to say that we also have to remember that the vast majority of survivors do not access the criminal justice system. It is really not seen as a safe place, particularly for indigenous, Black or racialized survivors, so our efforts need to go beyond just criminal justice reforms.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Hussain, if you want to add to that, you may do so.

You spoke of best practices in terms of the different types of measures, whether it's specialized courts or tracking bracelets. You also mentioned that we should look at what other countries are doing.

Do you have any other examples for us?

[English]

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: We did different assessments in many countries. We adopted those best practices in Canada. In Australia, for example, there is a financial code of practice among their financial institutions. Also, in the U.K. they have developed a financial code of practice to protect survivors.

This code of practice has really helped financial institutions to educate and to put policy and practices in place to protect survivors.

Also we have seen—

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off so we can continue.

I'm going to move on now to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have six minutes.

• (1340)

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today with your excellent testimony.

My first question is for Madam Whitmore. Your organization released a report, which was the national action plan community engagement initiative summary of findings. One thing you spoke about is the need to decriminalize sex work and support sex workers' labour movements.

Could you please share a little bit about why you made that recommendation and how this would support addressing intimate partner violence and violence against women?

Dr. Erin Whitmore: I think that it is a really complex issue that continues to need further research. I know that another committee is currently conducting sessions on that issue.

One thing we know, when we're talking about issues related to sex work, is that there is a need to make sure that recommendations are informed by the people who are working in that industry and those who are supporting them. What we have heard from people who are on the ground doing that work is that current legislation does not necessarily work to prevent violence and risk for those doing that work.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I also know that you recommended a guaranteed livable basic income, which I was really happy to see.

I'll move to Madam Haileyesus.

You talked about economic abuse. I've asked this question in other committees, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, article 4.5, directly calls for the implementation of a guaranteed livable basic income for all Canadians as a way to mitigate this crisis of violence.

Would you agree that a guaranteed livable basic income would assist women and diverse-gendered individuals to escape violence or not be as susceptible to economic abuse?

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: Yes. One of the reasons for economic abuse is their living conditions. Definitely, if we could have the infrastructure and support for our women, it would also be very important.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Has your organization endorsed the need for a guaranteed livable basic income?

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: Right now, our national task force, actually, in 2022, has a plan to review a universal income benefit. We'll come up with some policy recommendations, and maybe we can pass it before the House sometime soon.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes. That sounds wonderful.

I have another question, for Madam Hussain.

You spoke about the need for community initiatives that are culturally informed and trauma informed and bringing individuals together with like experiences as critical in addressing intimate partner violence. Could you expand on that a bit?

Ms. Yasmin Hussain: Yes. Thank you for your question.

There are such diverse experiences around gender-based violence, and survivors have such unique experiences. In the community we work with, already you're experiencing isolation from within your community, within the social context of wider Canadian society or from services. Having a space that builds a safe space as a first foundation, where their experiences are recognized and named,

which oftentimes also doesn't even happen within the communities they exist in, where I think sometimes forms of violence....

We all exist within norms. Every cultural community does. However, it's recognizing the specificity of those norms. Norms might look different. Norms that minimize violence or reinforce violence and victim-blame, all of those exist across communities and across cultures, but it looks different in communities and cultures. Bringing together spaces where there is a shared experience or recognition of how norms that reinforce control and abuse exist and happen is a powerful starting point to being able to name experiences and to challenge or disrupt those experiences.

Also, in terms of the experience, recognizing that people come with experiences moving to Canada or integration stressors, those are unique stressors that immigrants or newcomers face. Having those validated in spaces where people recognize shared experiences is really important. Sometimes it's easy to minimize, even for survivors or victims themselves, some of the isolation or the harm or marginalization they experience within systems because it's not named or validated elsewhere.

To me, that's an important starting point for empowerment.

• (1345)

Ms. Leah Gazan: How do those barriers differ for specific groups? You spoke about immigrant women, refugee women and women with a disability—

Ms. Yasmin Hussain: Absolutely. That's even within newcomer communities. We work within the diversity of the Muslim community, but the Muslim community is not homogenous. Syrian women might have very different barriers than Afghan women, or folks who identify as LGBTQ will have different barriers.

We always have to be very careful about it. There are shared experiences, but even with groups, there are very unique experiences. Therefore, we always have to make space for those unique experiences and look for where the most vulnerable or where the marginalized are, even within collective community identities.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to switch to our second round. Due to time limitations, I'm going to take time away from people. We're going to do four minutes for the CPC and LPC, and then we're down to two minutes for the NDP and the Bloc.

I welcome Shelby Kramp to our committee.

Shelby, you have four minutes.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's delightful being here.

I think we can all recognize that this is a complex, raw and very emotional issue for many people. I'll start by thanking our witnesses for being present.

We, around the table today, all have a voice and our role is to advocate and to make relevant legislation. My alarming concern is that there are so many young men and women in my riding of Hastings—Lennox and Addington and people across the country who feel that they don't have that voice. As we all know, abuse comes in many forms. It's sexual, physical, emotional and financial.

Ms. Whitmore actually said this earlier. She mentioned that we're great at gathering recommendations, and it's key, but it's more essential that we move swiftly to actually implement the recommendations that are on the table. That really needs to be a focus.

How do we break the barriers for young men and women who are embarrassed to speak up? Most of our teenagers are on social media. I have two daughters myself. They're on TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat. Is that a platform, for example, where there are messages going out to communicate with these young adults?

The Chair: Who would you like to take the question?

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Anyone can answer that one. I'll address the next question more specifically.

Dr. Erin Whitmore: Sure, I can try that question.

I think that it's so important, as you're saying, to break barriers about speaking out and to let people know that it is safe to speak out. In order to do that, we have to make sure that there are the supports available so that they can get them when they take the courageous step of speaking out.

Part of what needs to be done is addressing some of the stigma that young people can feel when they talk about being sexually abused or assaulted or experiencing other forms of violence. That comes back to doing that early prevention work early on, which isn't just talking about violence but also the harmful beliefs, norms and gender stereotypes that sort of play into violence.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

My next question refers to Clare's Law. I'm hoping that you're all familiar with it. It's the right to know and the right to ask. It's already enforced in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Are you familiar with this? It's based out of the U.K. Do you think this would be a solution that we could entertain?

My second question is more specifically addressed to Madam Haileyesus. My former career is a financial adviser, and I was 12 years in the financial field. You mentioned elder financial abuse and that financial institutions are helping to stop it. How can we translate that action that's already happened? Is it consistent or similar so that we could use that for young adults?

• (1350)

Dr. Erin Whitmore: I can briefly jump in about Clare's Law just to say that, yes, we are familiar with Clare's Law. I would sort of echo the point that I made earlier around Clare's Law being one

tool that may provide support for some survivors, but for it to be effective, it really needs to have resourcing available for the training that would need to happen as well as enough resources for people who are experiencing violence to access legal support if necessary.

I think we really want to be careful that something like Clare's Law doesn't put additional onus on victims in any way for leaving situations.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'm sorry. I'm going to have to turn it over now to Jenna Sudds.

Jenna, you have four minutes.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you so much.

Thank you to all of the witnesses who have joined us today. It's such important work.

For my first question I'm going to go to Yasmin. You spoke a bit about the importance of culturally informed programs, and I think we all on this committee recognize and have spoken about the barriers that can be in place for people from different religious or cultural backgrounds as they are facing domestic violence and the fact that reporting could be different and the definition could be different. We've also talked about the fact that sometimes there's this kind of underground network of support that exists for people in different communities.

I'm wondering if you could speak to that specifically and how we can harness those supports in a bigger way to help victims.

Ms. Yasmin Hussain: Thank you so much for that question. I think that's really important, recognizing the underground or informal supports that exist. A lot of our work is building the capacity for what is considered informal support but is often very crucial support, because it's a first step, maybe, to accessing more formalized supports or making decisions. Survivors can then make choices around the formalized supports they want to access.

I think that begins with working with communities around this issue. That engages community members. It also engages the faith community, faith leaders, recognizing that people have a responsibility and role to play that is proactive, and provides them with the knowledge and tools and equips them with the ability to play that role.

In our work, too, what I see is that a lot of it is challenging norms and building the capacity for community support, because a lot of times that underground or informal support.... It's important and it exists, but they may feel like they're in the minority. How do you shift that so that it becomes the majority within the community and where that voice becomes a dominant voice and is one that informs or creates that space for survivors to know that we have a caring community? These are the values that we uphold and address, so I think that's what a lot of our work.... I think those values are there. It's just amplifying those values, making space for those values and giving them the support they need.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: I appreciate that.

Just quickly, Erin, as you know, of course, we're currently working on the national action plan for gender-based violence. You made a few recommendations, and I'm wondering if you can elaborate a bit more. You mentioned the distinct needs of sexual violence survivors. Can you articulate for me what it is you'd like to see with respect to sexual violence survivors?

Dr. Erin Whitmore: Thank you.

I think part of it is ensuring that community-based sexual assault centres that specialize in providing support to survivors have the flexible core funding they need to provide those services. We also need to continue to address issues within the criminal justice system and its handling of, specifically, sexual assault investigations, as well as support alternative options for justice around transformative justice, which we're starting to see as offering some important work in that area.

I do think, though, that this work should happen within the national action plan, because the national action plan is about addressing the root causes—housing, poverty, economic insecurity, food insecurity and all of those things—that we need to really tackle in order to address gender-based violence in a really meaningful way.

• (1355)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Andréanne, you have two minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, Ms. Whitmore, for raising the issue of the national action plan. I would like to come back to it in closing.

Ms. Whitmore, do you have anything to add about the national action plan?

What could we do to speed up its implementation? At the moment it is expected to take nearly 10 years.

Finally, what should be in it?

Of course, I also invite the other two witnesses to make a brief conclusion explaining what we want to see in this report and what could be done to speed up the implementation of the plan.

[*English*]

Dr. Erin Whitmore: It needs to be a 10-year national action plan, because, again, it is about addressing systemic barriers and

making structural change, which takes a long time. We need to see the ongoing momentum of this work over a number of years and potentially over a number of different governments.

I think the national action plan work needs to be guided by the sector, by anti-violence advocates. We also really need to make sure it's harmonized with the work that's being done around the national action plan for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. That work needs to happen simultaneously.

Ms. Yasmin Hussain: I would agree with everything Erin Whitmore has said. Sometimes we delay starting points until we have a proper plan, and I think there's an opportunity to start in the immediate, knowing that the plan will build and grow over time. I think we know enough now. We know that there is an issue that needs to be addressed. We have momentum. We have enough information to start.

It's about building the opportunities to flow funding in ways that are long term and flexible and that meet existing organizations but also fund new organizations or grassroots initiatives as well. Include people in this ongoing conversation.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now turn it over to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have the final two minutes.

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

I really appreciate the commentary about recognizing and honouring housing as a human right. Ensuring food sustainability and proper income is the best way to mitigate the crisis of violence against women, girls and diverse genders.

Madam Haileyesus, your organization, in terms of policy recommendations, spoke about resources, about the funding that is needed for shelters, specifically shelters for newcomers and religious centres, to provide accessible information on economic abuse. Can you identify the gap and what it should actually look like if we're providing proper resources?

Ms. Meseret Haileyesus: Thank you so much. One of the gaps right now is that there is no educational material that speaks about economic and financial abuse. That's a huge gap not only for survivors and frontline workers. As I mentioned, there are also experts out there for whom an understanding of the nature of economic abuse is a little bit challenging because of this issue.

In terms of the resources, yes, we need to look at resources to develop trauma-informed and sensitive education materials, screening tools and any kind of conversation tool kit as well on how to talk to survivors of economic abuse, because their issue is very complex. The other thing we need is a national toll-free line, just a phone line so that women can access any financial counselling from a trauma perspective. We have seen this in many other countries. We know that we have a national toll-free line for survivors and victims of elder financial abuse, but we need to adopt this for gender-based violence and domestic violence abuse. These are very critical.

We are also developing right now a mobile app for women to flag and identify economic and financial abuse. That's another resource. This is small scale, but nationwide those resources are definitely very essential. It's a huge gap in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you so much. This has been a fantastic panel.

Thank you to Erin, Meseret and Yasmin for offering your expertise. On behalf of FEWO, we'd like to thank all of you for coming.

We're going to suspend for a few minutes to welcome our next panel.

• (1355) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1400)

The Chair: I would like to reconvene this afternoon's meeting. Thank you so much to the panellists for joining us to discuss intimate partner and domestic violence.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses.

From the Boys and Girls Club of Peel, we have Michael Jason Gyovai, executive director. From the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Kimberley Greenwood, co-chair of the victims of crime committee; and Francis Lanouette, co-chair of the crime prevention, community safety and well-being committee. From Changing Ways Inc., Tim Kelly, executive director.

You will all be provided five minutes for opening statements, so we're going to begin with the Boys and Girls Club.

Michael, you have five minutes.

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai (Executive Director, BGC Peel): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, Chair, vice-chairs and members. Thank you for inviting me on behalf of my organization, BGC Peel, formerly the Boys and Girls Club, and a federation partner with BGC Canada, to present a local, grassroots look at intimate partner and domestic violence across, in our case, the city of Brampton and region of Peel, especially for those in the marginalized and vulnerable communities that we serve.

As mentioned at the beginning, my name is Michael Gyovai. I'm the executive director of the club.

BGC Peel believes that, through our 40 years of service and on-the-ground experience with families, our mission to provide a safe, supportive place where children, youth and families can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers and build positive relationships, can be used as a foundation for solutions towards changing

how communities, children, youth and families deal with and aim to resolve domestic issues that potentially become violent.

BGC Peel's mandate is centred on prevention. The common trend that our staff and volunteers are hearing is that we need more useful, credible and impactful education, information and awareness around how to identify domestic violence, how to report it and who to report it to; how to protect each other, especially our children from it; and ultimately a long-term plan to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Facilitating the development and enhancement of community programs that aim at prevention and support while providing services for children and youth to support their development as individuals within the context of the family environment is a recommendation that BGC Peel urges the federal government to consider.

We know that we all can and should be doing better. Through the work we do, we know that it's communication with each other, with our children and with our families in our communities that will make those strides.

The teaching of prevention must be done at an early age. We look towards the future and our next generation and helping them with the perspective that they have on what it means to be kind. Working with those in authority can and should be seen as positive, not as interference. Most importantly, we want to raise our children to value and understand the world that we live in and what it demands of us in order to survive and thrive with equality, inclusion and acceptance of diversity.

Despite all of that, sometimes it's not enough. Families are telling my staff and our volunteers that they're ashamed and afraid at times to bring matters forward and, despite wanting to, they fight the urge to share the information of all forms of violence that impact their lives. Be it a lack of confidence in the system that manages these situations or not, when Canadians fear those who can protect them from those who can threaten them, we have a major issue that needs to be resolved.

In the region of Peel, over 85% of those who report violence are women. Stats that my staff found show that 43% of these women are 15- to 19-year-olds who have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime. That number drops to 24% for 20- to 24-year-olds, and 10% for 25 and up. That means that 67% of these young 15- to 24-year-olds, the bulk of girls and young women that BGC Peel and BGC Canada support, have experienced domestic or intimate violence at some level.

From Peel Regional Police, we found that they had seen an increase of 74% in their domestic calls over the last five years. One of the main impacts that we hear from our staff is the fallout regarding parental alienation and a parent's willingness to fight for their children's rights and access to them.

In conversation with Sheffanessa Brown, founder of Against Parental Alienation Canada, she brought to my attention that at the current time there are no federal or provincial laws that truly regulate parental alienation and the domestic violence that comes from it. We obviously understand that courts recognize it. We do believe that, through reviews and revision of the Criminal Code, there could be opportunities to change the wording to protect those who are victims and survivors of parental alienation.

When we reviewed the final reports for the ad hoc federal-provincial-territorial working group reviewing spousal abuse policies and legislation, we didn't notice that there was strong enough wording to see those kinds of protections. We would definitely love it if the federal government could go back, have a review and see how the impacts, directly and indirectly, are hurting our children, not only at the time of the situation but as they grow and become adults, and hopefully parents themselves.

In conclusion, BGC Peel is requesting that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women do a review to see what kinds of positive impacts organizations like BGC Peel, through BGC Canada, can offer intimate partners and their families dealing with domestic violence. Local partnerships with medical professionals, law enforcement and psychologists assist with helping to treat the core symptoms before the situation gets out of hand. We truly believe that education, awareness and community engagement would play a critical role in the de-escalation of domestic violence and repeat offences.

• (1405)

Let's work together to show that we're providing safe places and safe opportunities for our children, youth and families as we progress forward and, hopefully, bring an end to domestic violence at the local levels and throughout Canada. It's building on that foundation for positive actions and solutions to change to help these children at an early age break the trends that we're seeing so many times in families.

At BGC Peel, we believe that opportunity changes everything, and that "No. More. Barriers." is a starting point, not an end goal.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

• (1410)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'm now going to turn it over to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

Kimberley or Francis, I'm not sure who's taking up the five minutes, but I'm going to turn the floor over to you.

Chief Kimberley Greenwood (Co-Chair, Victims of Crime Committee, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police): Good afternoon. Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this committee on behalf of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

As you're aware, I'm Chief Kimberley Greenwood. I'm the co-chair of the victims of crime committee.

As police officers, we see first-hand the tragic and, sometimes, deadly effects that intimate partner violence brings to victims, their families and our communities. We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated concerns and stressed the need for consistent, national approaches to address intimate partner violence.

Women's shelters are reporting not only an increase in cases but an increase in the intensity of the violence and in the levels of fear experienced by victims. Shelters are also noting a spike in substance abuse as feelings of helplessness rise.

The many complexities of intimate partner violence and the need for a coordinated understanding of and response to it in Canada is paramount. In 2016, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, in partnership with the University of New Brunswick, released an evidence-based and research-driven "National Framework on Collaborative Police Action on Intimate Partner Violence". The framework is intended to provide police services across the nation with a shared language and understanding of intimate partner violence.

The key themes include: consistent police response and investigation practices that are victim focused and trauma informed in nature; the adoption of common tools and techniques for police intervention, including standardized risk assessments; sharing responsibilities across agencies, including public health, police, social agencies and other community organizations; effective court processes and case management to address risk and prevent further harm; more research and adapted, proven, evidence-based practices when monitoring and supporting offenders, like the research being conducted in Barrie on recidivism rates of intimate partner violence offenders; and finally the creation of a Canadian centre for policing intimate partner violence to bring the framework online and make it operational for our frontline officers and investigators.

Our work did not stop when the framework was launched. We are taking steps to produce additional resources on trauma-informed and victim-focused approaches, as well as educational material on coercive control.

I now turn over the presentation to Director Francis Lanouette. He is the co-chair of the crime prevention, community safety and well-being committee.

[*Translation*]

Chief Francis Lanouette (Co-Chair of the Crime Prevention, Community Safety and Well-being Committee, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police): Good afternoon.

As police officers, we know that by the time a domestic violence charge goes to court, it's likely that the victim has been experiencing some form of violence or controlling behaviours at the hands of their partner for a significant amount of time.

Recently, our association expanded its focus on domestic violence to address the issue of coercive control. Our committee is collaborating on research to better understand this phenomenon from a police perspective and to develop the tools necessary to detect it. To improve the understanding of this concept by the policing community, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police offered a webinar on this topic.

Our association also proposes other avenues of intervention to achieve continued progress to help protect victims sooner, before physical or visible harm comes to them. First, we must address current limitations in the Criminal Code when it comes to intervening in cases of domestic violence. As a result, we support legislative changes including the addition of coercive control as a new offence under the Criminal Code, as suggested in our submission on Bill C-247, which is now known as Bill C-202.

We also support adopting Intimate Partner Violence Disclosure Acts, Clare's Law, throughout all provinces and territories in Canada.

In addition to legislative changes, we are also calling for the development of a Canadian Intimate Partner Violence Policing Centre, as previously mentioned by Chief Greenwood; the implementation of courts specialized in these matters that would be better equipped to support victims throughout the judicial process; continued education and awareness initiatives with the general population, and especially with youth; the development of multi-sectoral teams whose mandate is to assess the risk of homicide in cases of intimate partner violence.

On this last point, it should be noted that, in Quebec, such rapid response teams are already being deployed and a new law on electronic bracelet systems has been adopted. The Quebec experience could perhaps be expanded across the country.

In conclusion, we must provide officers with tools to help them recognize and address intimate partner violence, including coercive control, because when victims remain silent in the belief that there is nothing police can do, they also lose out on the opportunity to access support agencies, resources, and opportunities to change their situation.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1415)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Finally, we're going to turn it over to Tim Kelly, who is from Changing Ways.

Tim, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Tim Kelly (Executive Director, Changing Ways Inc.): Thanks. It is really an honour to be here speaking to this committee. I'm coming to you from St. Thomas, Ontario, and I'm here to repre-

sent my agency, which is Changing Ways, and the work that we do in Ontario, both locally and provincially.

Changing Ways is a social service agency that specifically focuses on people who cause harm in their intimate relationships. While we do focus and do some work with women who have been caught up in the criminal justice system because of offences, the primary focus that we work on is with men causing harm in their relationships as well as men who are exposing their children to abuse and causing harm. Our head office is in London but we have offices in St. Thomas and Chatham so we are a southwestern Ontario service provider. I just saw Ms. Vecchio's face when I said that. Yes, this is where we are.

I'm happy to be here. In addition to that job, which is an awful lot to do, I'm also a service manager at the Children's Aid Society of Oxford County, and I manage a specialized embedded service that works with people who have experienced harm in their intimate relationships, both survivors and children and men who cause harm, in addition to supports for women who are using violence as well. That's me. That's what I'm coming here to talk to you about.

I'm not going to repeat everything that everyone said and I couldn't do it anyway. When I looked at who was on the list of speakers here, I was excited to be here and also I have to say my heart sunk a bit because the association of working with men who cause harm or people who cause harm and the criminal justice system is one of the issues and one of the problems that we're dealing with in trying to address this issue earlier on.

The reason I want to bring that forward is this. I've been the director of Changing Ways for 23 years. I've worked there for over 30 years, and trying to actually look at moving the intervention to prevention further upstream has been a constant problem for us. Right now, for most places in Ontario and across the province, the threshold to actually access services for men who are causing harm is a criminal offence, so the implication for that is that there's nothing happening prior to police involvement. From my perspective, police are an amazing service. They are a last resort that we need to be doing, so what I want to throw out to this group is to start considering what prevention would look like and what a national strategy on prevention would look like.

Without taking up a whole lot of time, I've just sat in awe over the last two years on what a national strategy to prevent a virus could look like. When I think about the intentionality of that work and the intentionality of a federal government engaging in working with provincial governments to actually take on an incredibly invasive issue, I don't see intimate partner violence as any different from that. What I would implore the federal government to think about doing, in terms of a strategy, is that, looking at criminal justice as a response, it can't be the only response that we have here. We need to look at ways in which we can engage broadly across the country, provincially, in municipalities, locally, all of those things, and have a focused look at what we're doing here.

The health care system does an amazing job of thinking about prevention. Again, the way it attacked this COVID pandemic we had is a really good example of how, if we actually pull ourselves together and think about this and then look for local efforts to end violence against women and intimate partner violence, I think we can get there.

I'll surrender the floor.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Tim, I'm just Karen. Everybody will find out I'm just Karen here because that's the way I like to do it at FEWO. Thank you so much.

We will be going around for our first round of questions. It will be six minutes per party and then we'll come around to the second round. We're going to begin today's questions with Michelle Ferreri.

Michelle, you have six minutes.

• (1420)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I need about six hours. What a group of witnesses.

I can't stress enough how interesting what you just said is, Tim.

Michael, you're the prevention end of it. The police chiefs here are the intervention, when something has happened.

Then we have you, Tim, who has to come in and try to do the restorative piece.

It's a very interesting group of witnesses we have here. My real passion is to speak to what Tim was saying. It's really on the prevention and early intervention end of things. We know that we have an opioid crisis, and for a lot of people, I think there's a real tie-in here. All women who are victims of domestic violence don't always end up in a shelter. They have to treat that pain and abuse in different ways, in maladaptive coping mechanisms. I think we would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge that the opioid crisis and a lot of things that are happening on the street are connected to this committee. I think that is something to take into consideration.

I want to start with you, Michael. I think for children who are in an environment that is being programmed, for lack of a better term, you can do all of the things you want to do at Boys and Girls Club, which is phenomenal work, telling kids what a healthy relationship is, but if they're just going home and seeing something different from the core people in their lives, that's a very big uphill battle.

I want to ask a couple of questions around the tools that you could be using or that you are using. Number one, I'm curious about what you do in terms of social media training with the kids you have coming to your Boys and Girls Club.

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: Thank you for that question. I agree that it is all about communicating with them at an early stage. I will get to your question on social media, but first, it's very important that we acknowledge them and that we identify to them that they have support here for everything they're looking for. The situations they find themselves in, they didn't put themselves in those situa-

tions. It's important for them to know their value and to have that understanding.

Regarding social media, we make it of very high value to anyone who is trained with us, from staff to volunteers, to receive social media training on the safeguards, on what we're allowed to do and what we're not allowed to do. More importantly, we sit down with each individual child—in the last two years, through virtual—and explain to them the safeguards. We've been able to partner with a couple of organizations. Actua has done some fantastic training for us regarding cyber-bullying and cyber-interference.

To get back to the overall messaging, it's about how we communicate to the children and youth on the level at which they can understand it. We can go in, we can throw a bunch of terms at them, we can talk to them like we're talking now, but you have to understand that you have to get down to their level of what it means to them for the situation. What does it mean when they're...?

Well, a child under 13 shouldn't be on social media in the first place, in my opinion.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Hear, hear.

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: In my opinion, they shouldn't be on it under 16.

To be honest, we need more federal safeguards protecting them. At the end of the day, to Tim's point, I love the work that our field police do, but if it's getting to that point, then we've already lost control of the situation.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you. I hate rushing everybody, but I have so much I want to get to.

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: Yes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I hope there is a documented thing of federal safeguards for children and social media. I hope that makes in- to our committee report.

I want to talk a little about building trust, because I think that's the essence of all of the things here.

It's interesting, because before I heard you talk, Tim, I didn't actually know as much as you explained, which was great, about lived experience—men who've actually come out on the other side and are now trying to restore themselves. Are you working, or would you suggest working, with police and the Boys and Girls Club? Because they've been on the other side. They know those telltale signs and they can talk to police in terms of negotiating and all of these things for restorative justice, the lived experience aspect, to build the trust with these domestic violence cases that sometimes women just do not want to report.

Mr. Tim Kelly: Absolutely. It's certainly one of the things that we as an organization.... I know that many of the men's programs across Ontario, which are the ones I know the best, have relationships with local police departments or provincial police departments and other services that are there in our communities.

The other place that I think is really key for us to be thinking about is connecting with child welfare and how the families that we're talking about, the types of behaviours that we're looking at, show up in child welfare much earlier than they'll show up in a police report. In fact, when police go out on a call and there isn't necessarily evidence of a charge to be laid, they will make a referral to child welfare and move that investigation over there.

There are lots of opportunities to be working within our communities and within our broader provincial and federal communities to really begin to look at it. What are those intersectional points at which these families and these men come into our system? We know from our own research that we've done over the years that they show up in general practice offices with their doctors. They show up in child welfare situations. They show up in all kinds of places.

It's about working within those communities of service providers to actually grab these guys and begin to do that work with them. I think that work is absolutely informed by men who've gone through this process.

• (1425)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much.

Am I out of time?

The Chair: You are. You have four seconds. Thank you so much.

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

Sonia, you have six minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

My first question is for the Boys and Girls Club.

Thank you, Mr. Gyovai. I want to say thank you to the Boys and Girls Club people for their 40th anniversary. Thanks for all the work you are doing in the community, giving safe space to Brampton youth.

In this committee we have heard that young people are experiencing violence at alarming rates. For some youth, relationships can turn abusive. You mentioned that teens were the largest group there. How can we provide teens, parents and educators with the resources to recognize and prevent teen dating violence?

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: Thank you, Sonia, for that question.

One of the biggest things we need to do is to start listening to our youth about what they want and provide them with an opportunity to have their voices heard, not just through BGC but throughout Canada. We provide opportunities for peer-to-peer development and peer-to-peer mentoring and training, so they have a comfortable outlet in which to talk. Within local communities, there needs to be—and I know we talked all about this through COVID—true collaboration with the end result of serving these youths who need the guidance.

I have two teenagers myself. Many youth are very awkward, so opportunities need to be made available for them to speak to their peers or to individuals who have been in situations they've been in.

If there are opportunities through the federal government to download additional funding towards community engagement for organizations—be it BGC or others—we need to provide those safe and easily accessible places for our youth to go.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: We know that children who grow up in homes with violence are more likely to form relationships later in life where they are either a victim or an abuser. Can you tell us what interventions you use to coach children to avoid this pattern and break the cycle of abuse?

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: To an earlier point, it's prevention. It's not just through organizations like BGC. It needs to start within our school boards. It needs to start within our overall community engagement and in how we speak to the children about their value and what they bring to society. Talk to the kids about their passions. Talk to the kids within the context of what is happening in their lives. Make accessible the professionals who actually know how to handle these situations and, more importantly, know how to engage with the youth.

It comes down to the way we communicate.

Sonia, as you know from living in the Brampton region of Peel, we're one of the most diverse communities across Canada. There's a need to be able to access interpreters and resources for newcomers. In BGC, 75% of our members are newcomers within the last five years. They need a go-to place where they can get these resources without feeling afraid and without feeling ashamed, just so they can get a better understanding of what it means to be Canadian.

I think that sometimes we forget that a lot of our new immigrants come from countries where.... It's not that domestic violence is accepted, but unfortunately it's the norm. When they come to Canada, we want to make sure they feel as safe and as comfortable as they can.

It takes all levels of government. In Peel's case, it takes all four levels of government to make sure that these resources are accessible and available at no cost. There should be no cost for someone's safety.

• (1430)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Madam Chair, my next question is for the representative from the Canadian Association Chiefs of Police.

Cybercrime and online bullying are on the rise. Criminals are especially targeting girls and teens online. We need new tools against these new challenges.

In your opinion, do think cybersecurity training or...? What kinds of safeguards or solutions are you recommending?

[Translation]

Chief Francis Lanouette: I will let Ms. Greenwood answer your question, Ms. Sidhu.

[English]

Chief Kimberley Greenwood: Thank you very much.

When we look at cybercrime, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police does have a group that focuses in on cybercrime. We know and have seen that children and youth are victimized through the use of cybercrime.

The tools that we recommend and all the initiatives we're involved in start with awareness and education for those impacted and for the police officers who are involved with the youth. We look at engagement with the parents and the agencies that work with youth and children, from our education system to our social agencies. The last part is the enforcement involved in these cases. It's a multipronged approach to looking at cybercrime as it relates to intimate relationships between children and youth.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Do you think cybersecurity training is going to be helpful?

Chief Kimberley Greenwood: The training for youth and police, every tool that makes our community safer and focuses on prevention, intervention and reducing victimization, we're all supporters of those types of initiatives.

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

We're now going to move to Andréanne.

Andréanne, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses on the second panel, which was very diverse. They gave us their point of view, and that helps us to do our work. Thank you to Mr. Gyovai, Mr. Lanouette, Mr. Kelly and Ms. Greenwood.

I would like to address the issue of the criminalization of coercive control, as well as training stakeholders in the justice system, including police officers and judges. In the first round of questions, we briefly discussed the importance of working on the issue of coercive control.

These accumulated measures should be seen as tools that can be used to counter the problem of intimate partner violence and domestic violence.

I would like to hear from the two representatives of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police about the training of resources in the justice system.

In order to better support women who are victims of domestic violence, do you believe it is necessary to broaden the notion of coercive physical violence throughout the reporting process? Are you missing tools to better accompany victims?

You talked about what is being done in Quebec, namely the specialized court, and tracking bracelets. I would now like you to talk about how important it is for the federal government and the Criminal Code to take into account what is being done in Quebec to improve outcomes for victims.

Chief Francis Lanouette: For about a year or a year and a half, the association has undertaken research that does indeed focus on coercive control. The experiences of the United Kingdom, that is to say Scotland, Wales and England, have demonstrated the importance of training all direct and indirect stakeholders. Training on coercive control is needed not only for police officers, but also for all those working in the justice system, such as lawyers and judges. The specialized court, a model being developed in Quebec, is a step in this direction.

In our view, this is essential, but we need to go further. For instance, community organizations must be included as well. It is necessary for all agencies that revolve around victims of domestic violence to have a good understanding of coercive control.

We have talked about tools. I would like to clarify that the research is also focused on developing screening tools for the public and for police officers. The goal is to get to the point where we can properly outline the concept of coercive violence and enter elements of coercive control into evidence. Naturally, this requires amending the Criminal Code. You can't make an amendment to a section of the code without a training component.

• (1435)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You talked about training, but also about legislation currently under consideration, Bill C-202, which could help support initiatives implemented in Quebec.

Chief Francis Lanouette: Initiatives are being implemented in Quebec and throughout Canada.

The notion of coercive control is now appearing in various assessment tools much more frequently, including those used by police and community agencies. Five or six years ago, in Canada, this terminology was used much less, but it is now up to date. We realize that we need to be able to broaden the concept.

Let's take the example of Scotland. That country has chosen to make domestic violence an offence under the Criminal Code. This offence takes into account the whole aspect of coercive control.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Another issue was raised, the infamous relapses, this is to say when women return to their violent spouse. Unfortunately, this undermines the healing process.

How do police officers deal with relapses? How can we better intervene with both parties? What would ensure that women don't return to their violent spouse?

Chief Francis Lanouette: Ms. Greenwood, do you want to answer the question?

[English]

Chief Kimberley Greenwood: Thank you very much for that.

If you look at some of the research that is being conducted across the country within police services, we're looking to improve the accuracy of our forecasting high-harm intimate partner violence offenders. We're looking to assess the reduction of repeat victimization from an offender perspective.

We need to work collaboratively with our service partners to ensure that victims have the right tools to support them as they move forward, away from the abuse, or if they do return to individuals who have abused them in the past, they need to have the support so that, if they need to exit again, they have had a successful assessment done of their situation and they have a program whereby they can exit as soon as possible.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: If I understood correctly, it is also important to study what is being done elsewhere throughout the world so that we can learn from it. This would help improve processes for helping victims in Canada, wouldn't it?

Chief Francis Lanouette: Of course, looking at what has been done in the United Kingdom and elsewhere...

[English]

Chief Kimberley Greenwood: That is correct. Just looking at Clare's Law and some other studies around the world, that is the work we are doing with the association also.

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

We're now going to move over, for the next six minutes, to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have the floor.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

Thank you to the panellists for being here today.

My first question is for the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. We've heard on other panels, of course, that many individuals, women and diverse-gendered individuals, fleeing violence often don't feel safe going to police. I would say that's particularly pronounced for indigenous peoples, who have historically had a very violent colonial history with police, including with the development of police.

As you know, the RCMP was formed to forcibly remove indigenous peoples off their land. That kind of violent colonial relationship, as we saw in Wet'suwet'en territory with RCMP taking down a door with a chainsaw, an axe and a guard dog against two unarmed indigenous women on unceded territories, we see again continue. Eishia Hudson, who was shot by the Winnipeg city police, was 16 years old, and there's currently an inquest happening in my city.

That's why it's not surprising that in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls there were a number of calls for justice specific to police.

I want to read you call for justice 9.5, specifically related to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police:

We call upon all police services for the standardization of protocols for policies and practices that ensure that all cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people are thoroughly investigated. This includes the following measures:

This measure is specific to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police:

v. Create a national strategy, through the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, to ensure consistency in reporting mechanisms for reporting missing Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people. This could be developed in conjunction with implementation of a national database.

That is a very important one. I'll give you an example and then I'll give you time to respond.

Often it's very common in Winnipeg for indigenous women to go missing. It's like a daily occurrence. We've had cases in Winnipeg where they actually use people's mug shots and put that out in the public, which is terribly dehumanizing, and it speaks to the need to change protocol.

Where is the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police on implementing that call for justice?

• (1440)

Chief Kimberley Greenwood: Thank you very much.

With the community safety and well-being committee focusing on this work, along with the victims of crime committee, it is part of our strategies. It is included in the intimate partner violence framework and the sexual violence framework, looking at our responses and how we support those who are vulnerable in our community, such as the indigenous girls, women and children. We're looking at women who are living with disabilities, LGBTQ, two-spirited, sex workers and older women. This is something that is part of what we're looking to do.

We talk about consistent language and consistent tools, whether you are from the Northwest Territories—

Ms. Leah Gazan: This is my concern. It's my concern with the federal government as well. The national inquiry, of course, came out in 2019. There's no targeted money directly attached to the issue of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. I asked the minister where they were in implementing the calls for justice, and they said they were working on it.

I'm asking you very straightforwardly: Where are you at in terms of the final implementation of the calls for justice?

Chief Kimberley Greenwood: We are working as an association through the multiple levels of government, and we are working very closely with the RCMP on the implementation of not just this area but all of the areas in regard to it. It is about policy development, and it is the responsibility of the services to ensure that they have policies in place, so we do encourage—

Ms. Leah Gazan: With all due respect, it sounds like it hasn't been implemented. It's still a work-in-progress, which is concerning.

My question is for Mr. Gyovai, which is a pretty interesting name.

You talked about how a lot of time families or kids have difficulty coming forward. They feel shame. Is part of that fear related to worry that kids will be apprehended into child welfare systems? Are they keeping family secrets out of fear of families being separated?

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: From our level of interaction, I can see where that would be, because we have heard that. However, directly from our kids, it's about not wanting to hurt mom and/or dad. In our cases, we do have a variety of children who are dealing with parental alienation issues. They're afraid that, if they say something to dad or to mom, the other parent might get mad at them, and they might get in trouble for that. Directly from what we hear, it's not regarding removal. It's more about hurting their parent they're mostly not with.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to go on to our second round. We will have five minutes for both the CPC and the Liberals, and two and a half minutes for both the NDP and the Bloc.

I'm going to pass it over to Shelby.

Shelby, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you, Karen.

Thank you to all the witnesses who are present today.

The first question would be directed more towards, I believe, Ms. Greenwood.

When officers see signs of intimate partner and domestic violence, they see the sexual or physical type of abuse. When there are other types of abuse, like emotional and financial, it's a lot more difficult to see. Is there a process that is followed and is that particular process different for those who are teenagers versus those who are older adults?

• (1445)

Chief Kimberley Greenwood: There are many parts to your question there.

When we look at the patterns of intimate partner violence, it encompasses many areas, such as hurt, humiliation, intimidation, exploitation and isolation. These are things police officers are aware of.

We need to ensure that they have more training in this area, because most of our intimate partner violence response traditionally is on the physical piece. If there's one incident, police are called and conduct the investigation. We know this issue is much more complex than this, and we want to ensure that our officers on the front lines have the tools they need to identify, whether we capture it as coercive control.... We heard from the other panel about some financial impacts, isolation and denying women and young people access to information.

Is there a difference between how we respond to intimate partner violence in youth and adults? Yes, there is, because the complexities change. The relationships tend to be quite different. They may not be as long term in youth as we see in adults. A key piece is

working collaboratively with other agencies to ensure that officers have all the tools they need, they have the education and they have the awareness so that they make the right decision when one group of officers attends or a next group of officers responds in these complex investigations.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you very much for that.

Further, we can all recognize the format and way in which the intimate partner and domestic violence that happens in Canada is very different. It has evolved in the last 10 years. How are we keeping our force current?

I certainly applaud everyone for what they're able to do. I'm not in that field for a reason, and I give hero cookies to everyone who does that, because it's quite admirable. Is there a way to keep them current, because it's changing so much?

Chief Kimberley Greenwood: It is changing so much. When we look at the work that has been done with the national framework specifically for intimate partner violence, we are now looking at adding on to it, whether we're speaking about coercive control or in regard to a trauma-informed approach.

When we look back to the eighties, when I started policing, intimate partner violence was approached very differently. We were able to swing the pendulum and we were able to have mandated charges. Now we know that victims come forward at different times and disclose differently. Our members have to be regularly trained and be aware of these things. At a national level, and in provincial and local areas, there is specific training around intimate partner violence, sexual violence and trauma-informed approaches.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

My next question is directed at Mr. Gyovai. I loved what you said with regard to education, awareness and communication. I think that is key to whatever we're talking about. More specifically, you noted that from 15 to 24 is a really prevalent age. I really think we need to speak their language.

Are we, are you, having communication and advocating where that age group is, for example, on TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram? Are you at that level?

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: We are at that level. We make it an intention to be on those levels. Not only are we helping to provide them with guidance and information through that, we are able to monitor what the traffic is on there. As we see things coming up, we are able to take it back into program and bring up those issues directly to help advocate, but also to help keep the youth informed through our family program. Then we take that and we talk directly to the parents about what issues they need to be aware of, what things kids are looking at today, and we try to get a full and encompassing partnership with the families and the youth.

We know that when the families are involved in what their children are doing, kids are more likely to be safe. Also, when you talk directly to the kids and you give them the respect that they deserve, they are more willing to listen and be co-operative in conversations. Just like us as adults, we don't always like being told what to do. Kids like it even less.

• (1450)

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to turn it over to Marc Serré.

Marc, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for their testimony, which is very relevant to our study.

My first question is for Ms. Greenwood or Mr. Lanouette and will be on the definition of “abuse”. There is the Criminal Code, but also all sorts of circumstances where one's hands can be tied.

Can you talk more about this and what the federal government can do about it?

And then can you tell us how this relates to the cultural issue and minority groups so that we can improve our report?

Chief Francis Lanouette: First of all, in terms of the definitions themselves, when we talk about coercive control, it encompasses the whole range of abuse that can occur with domestic violence or intimate partner violence. That is the idea behind the notion of coercive control. This notion is broader in scope and encompasses all types of abuse, including financial and psychological abuse.

Today, social networks and our phones all have GPS, and women can be tracked at a distance by spouses inclined to control their actions. This is why we have to talk about coercive control. This is indeed one of the key elements. We need to clearly define coercive control and make it an offence in the Criminal Code.

As for the second part of the question about diversity, I am not sure I fully understood it. Perhaps Ms. Greenwood can answer it.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Ms. Greenwood, do you have anything to add on this subject?

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Serr : When you look at definitions of abuse, your experience is more on the cultural side, the religion side. Is there any recommendation along those lines for minority groups?

Chief Kimberley Greenwood: The position that we have taken from the CACP is that we've looked at the World Health Organization when we talk about intimate partner violence. It refers to behaviours of an intimate partner—or ex-partner, that is something we have to keep in mind—that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, which the director has spoken about. It includes aggression, coercion and controlling behaviour. It is the dynamics between the power and control, and we recognize that the diversity within our country will impact those who feel free to come forward and report intimate partner violence.

We need to ensure that people feel comfortable coming forward to the police and, if they're not comfortable coming forward to the police, that we have third parties and organizations that can help people feel comfortable coming forward, or even using tools where it doesn't have to be the individual—even if it's an app, for example—to come forward and report things such as sexual violence or intimate partner violence. Then at least we have some record of what is occurring so that we can offer services that aren't through the justice system.

Mr. Marc Serr : That links in to a question for Mr. Gyovai. When you look on the prevention side or the social media side, the U.S. Congress has had a lot of the social media companies, like TikTok, come to testify at committees, especially about youth or the exploitation of youth.

Do you have a specific recommendation for us, the federal government, to look at the social media aspect, especially related to youth?

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: There definitely needs to be a deeper look into protection and the way that stats and information are being used by and shared with the children and youth who are on there. I say “children”, because we know that there are kids under the age of 13 who are finding ways onto the social media platforms.

I believe that, across Canada, our police services are doing great work behind the scenes to ensure that predators are not getting access to our children.

We also need to bring greater awareness by educating parents, especially our new immigrant parents who don't have access to these forms of technology, as was mentioned earlier. Technology accessibility, especially in marginalized communities, is very limited due to the cost. There needs to be greater attention put on safeguards that not only kids can understand at their level, but that parents can appreciate and help implement.

• (1455)

The Chair: That's fantastic. Thank you.

Mr. Marc Serr : Madam Chair...?

The Chair: You had 10 seconds, Marc.

Mr. Marc Serr : You're wonderful. Thank you.

The Chair: If everyone could get that on the record, it would be fantastic.

We're going to now move over to Andr anne. You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you again to the representatives of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police for the answers they gave me during my first speaking turn.

For my second turn, I would like to talk more about prevention with Mr. Gyovai and Mr. Kelly. In Quebec, we already have a well-integrated health and social services system, which has its own way of accompanying victims. But the real crux of the matter is financial resources, which allow us to enhance our work on this public health issue.

I would like you to tell us about the importance of eliminating barriers that prevent money from being transferred directly to organizations or shelters that help victims. These organizations even work with violent men and offer them support, as well as providing social services.

Health transfers are also important for the redistribution of funds to organizations that work in prevention.

I would like to hear your comments on this.

[English]

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: I'll say a bit, but I'll leave most of the time for Tim to speak on it.

We have a fantastic relationship with our national body, BGC Canada, which does a lot of the higher-level advocating on this process. They've been in conversation with many leaders across the provinces to ensure that, when there's funding availability, it flows through the national board so that the organizations below—in our case, as a federation model—in the right communities are getting the right kind of funding and access to resources.

I'll turn the rest of my time over to Tim.

Mr. Tim Kelly: Thanks.

I've really found this whole conversation interesting, because there's a hole in the middle of it, which is those who are causing harm and how we take that piece on.

I agree that there are funding barriers that need to be looked at. It could be looking at alternative ways of addressing men's violence, when you're working with traditional practices within indigenous communities. It could be looking at the barriers that are in place for biracial and Black communities accessing services, when they don't trust the police response that's happening, historically, to them. There are options that we need to consider if we're going to take this on in a serious way and provide off-ramps for people to access services that don't necessarily involve formal processes, like criminal justice and police responses.

If we really want to take a look at this and try to get ahead of this issue, we need to look at where that funding streams through, how it works, the support of women and women's services, and then begin to really take seriously how we open access to individuals who want to deal with this issue but don't necessarily trust the systems that are in place.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to now move over for our last bit of questioning with Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

My last question is for Mr. Gyovai. I love the Boys and Girls Clubs. Strini Reddy in Manitoba was the founder of the Boys and Girls Club, an icon who's just loved in our community and who has managed to be the leader of many other critical programs for boys, girls and non-binary young people in our neighbourhoods.

As a former educator, I see the value in what you do, and I know that there needs to be a clear connection with schools. That's one of the things the Boys and Girls Club is known for—your seamless integration into schools.

Why is that model important, particularly when working with kids who may be living in environments where there is violence?

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: It's very important that we all work together. I know everyone uses the line, but we're truly working together. We need to make sure that the language and the lessons that are being taught in school are being echoed at BGC, or the Boys and Girls Club. We want to make sure, for children and youth, that there's no misinterpretation and there's no confusion over the messaging. All of us who work with kids or have kids know it's about repetition and making sure that the kids hear as much of the positive messaging and accurate messaging as they need.

To my earlier point, make sure that you get the parents involved so they know what's going on. Many of us as parents don't find out sometimes until the last second what's happening with our kids, so when we have the opportunity to get the parents involved, be it through the school councils, the teacher-parent interaction or BGC through our programs, interactions and volunteering, that's where we see the real changes. It comes down to those true collaborations, and it comes down to just your basic communication and speaking at the level of the individual you're engaging.

• (1500)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

In terms of engaging parents or caregivers, what kinds of activities do you do in terms of educating around violence or family violence?

Mr. Michael Jason Gyovai: Any information that we provide to our youth we provide to the parents. We offer them outside programming, their own workshops or groups to come in and speak about the stuff they're hearing from the kids and to speak about their concerns and issues. Through BGC Canada, that's where a lot of our advocacy work has been very much focused on getting the messaging across the country on ways to prevent to ensure that kids continue to strive and thrive.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much. I'd really like to thank Michael, Kimberley, Francis and Tim.

Our hour has come to an end, but there has been fantastic testimony.

Today's meeting is adjourned.

Thank you, everybody, and to everybody, happy International Women's Day on Tuesday. I look forward to seeing everybody back at the committee on Tuesday, March 22.

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