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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1140)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Thank you very much, everybody.

We are back for the second part of our meeting. We are doing a study of human trafficking, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Tuesday—

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Chair, we have no interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: Is there interpretation now? That's fantastic.

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

I'd like to make a few comments. I remind everybody that this is a very difficult subject. For anyone, if you're triggered, let us know. For those who are on Zoom, make sure you press your choice of English, French or floor—whatever works for you—and make sure you mute yourself when you're not speaking.

I would like to welcome everybody. All the connection tests have been done. I know we need to get right to work, so I would like to welcome our witnesses for this panel.

In the room, from the Action Coalition on Human Trafficking Alberta Association, we have Kate Price, the executive director. From the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, we have Angela Wu, who is the executive director from SWAN Vancouver. From the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, Rosel Kim is the senior staff lawyer; and from the Yukon Status of Women Council, we have Jessica Stone, who is the project manager.

We're going to be providing you each five minutes to speak, and we're going to be starting with Kate Price.

When you see my hand, please start wrapping up.

Andr anne, go ahead on a point of order.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Can you confirm that it's the representative of the DisAbleD Women's Network of Canada who won't be attending the meeting because they failed the sound test?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, the DisAbleD Women's Network of Canada did fail the test, unfortunately. They have sent in a brief, but they tried the headset and it was not working out very well today.

Go ahead, Anita. Do you have a question?

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Yes. I wonder if there's a chance to reschedule them maybe for Thursday or another day, because this is a gap that we have. We haven't heard from any women's disability groups on this issue.

The Chair: They are working on that. We're already offering some things, and we're looking at spaces already. That's absolutely an issue.

We're going to be turning the floor over right now to Kate Price.

When you see me start wrapping it up, you can take about 10 to 15 seconds and then you'll be done.

Kate, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Kate Price (Executive Director, Action Coalition on Human Trafficking Alberta Association): Thank you.

Good morning, Madam Chair and honourable committee members. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to contribute today and speak about the issue of human trafficking in Canada.

My name is Kate Price, and I am the executive director of ACT Alberta, which stands for the Action Coalition on Human Trafficking.

In the spirit of reconciliation, I respectfully acknowledge the traditional lands of diverse indigenous peoples on which we meet today.

ACT Alberta is a non-governmental, non-profit charity that operates province-wide. We run a community-based victim services unit that uses a harm reduction model to provide specialized case management to victims and survivors of both labour and sex trafficking. We offer free anti-trafficking education to the public, as well as tailored training programs for industries, such as law enforcement, health care and transportation. We use a coalition model to strengthen referral networks, cross-agency partnerships and research initiatives, in order to help build our community's capacity to combat human trafficking.

Today, I would like to raise three points for your consideration to highlight critical nuances of supporting survivors.

My first point is that sensationalizing human trafficking is harming victims. Sensationalizing can form an unconscious bias or a harmful stereotype, or perpetuate the idea of a “perfect victim”. According to a report by the Canadian Women’s Foundation, 62% of trafficking victims in Canada were trafficked by an intimate partner or someone they knew well. If we are looking for shackles, bars on windows or human smuggling, we may miss the human rights violations occurring right in front of us. Sensationalizing this crime may make the victim or survivor feel their experience is not traumatic enough to come forward. They may feel minimized and downplay their experience because it doesn’t mirror what they see in the media.

ACT Alberta has had the privilege of serving hundreds of survivors. While there may be some statistical overlap, their stories are their own. Human trafficking can and does happen to anyone. Coercion and manipulation are more common than restraints. Awareness-raising initiatives must be thoughtfully developed to better represent the diversity of survivors and their experiences.

My second point is that we must not dictate the opinions of survivors. Whether an organization believes in ending the demand for sex work, decriminalizing sex work or remaining neutral in this debate, the priority should always be empowering the survivor. Stats Canada reports that almost half of Canadians who are in recovery from an active addiction will face social stigma in society, which creates significant barriers to accessing treatment and support services. Whether a survivor wants to pursue sobriety, exit or remain in the sex industry, or report their abuser, it is their decision alone and one they shouldn’t make with judgment.

It’s important to remember that the trauma a survivor has experienced may have started long before they were trafficked. In a study done by the Polaris Project, of the 457 survivors surveyed, 96% of participants had experienced childhood abuse, whether psychological, sexual or physical. Trauma-informed care helps us acknowledge someone’s response to trauma and change the question from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” We need to understand that survivors are equal partners in planning, developing and monitoring care. Person-centred care means putting survivors at the centre of decisions and regarding them as experts—

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: On a point of order, Madam Chair. The sound is cutting out, and it’s interfering with the interpretation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Perhaps you could go back to the last two sentences, if you don’t mind. We’ll start from there again. I stopped the clock.

Go ahead.

Ms. Kate Price: We need to understand that survivors are equal partners in planning, developing and monitoring care to make sure it meets their needs. Person-centred care means putting survivors at the centre of decisions and regarding them as experts working alongside professionals to get the best outcome.

My third and final point is that labour trafficking is rampant. While I know this study is focusing on sexual exploitation, it’s very important to not overlook labour trafficking, a crime that thrives in otherness and often intersects with exploitation and sex trafficking. Traffickers typically target racialized and marginalized individuals who have precarious documentation and status in Canada. In 2022, 55% of ACT Alberta’s clients experienced labour trafficking, and 100% of our labour trafficking cases involved clients of international origin.

Based on our frontline experience and that of our partners, ACT Alberta believes the national statistics on the prevalence of labour trafficking do not accurately depict the reality. Investing in research and direct support for survivors of labour trafficking is critical. Equally important is addressing the systemic and cultural racism that minimizes the urgency of this issue.

As you pursue this research initiative, I ask you to please consider the nuances of survivor-centred care and to continue to prioritize diversity of thought.

Thank you for your time today and for all your work to combat the trafficking of women, girls and gender-diverse people.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I was just advised that the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund has only until 12:15 p.m., so I will ask Rosel to take her five minutes right now. As we start our questions, I would ask members to take that into consideration.

Rosel, I will give you the next five minutes.

Ms. Rosel Kim (Senior Staff Lawyer, Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund): Good morning. My name is Rosel Kim. I’m a senior staff lawyer at the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund, also known as LEAF. I’m grateful to appear today from what is now known as Toronto, which is on the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Wendat, other Anishinabe and the Haudenosaunee nations.

Founded in 1985, LEAF is a national charitable organization that advocates for the substantive equality of all women, girls, trans and non-binary people. We do this through litigation, law reform and public legal education that is feminist and intersectional. As an organization with a mission to advance substantive gender equality, LEAF is committed to ending the exploitation of women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Thank you for inviting LEAF to participate in this important study. I want to make three main points in my opening remarks today.

First, effectively addressing the exploitation of women, girls and gender-diverse people requires responses that aim to address systemic oppression, such as colonialism, racism and transphobia, among others. A systemic approach to ending exploitation also requires acknowledging the negative impacts of state actors and actions. For example, Elene Lam from Butterfly noted how police can serve as a source of violence for Black, indigenous and racialized sex workers, and how encounters with the police can lead to negative consequences like detention and deportation for migrant sex workers.

Taking this into account, measures to address exploitation must be grounded in anti-oppression and respect the agency and self-determination of everyone involved. As Krystal Snider from Wome-natthe-centrE remarked before this committee, saviourism and victimization language used by organizations and law enforcement doing anti-trafficking work can lead to trauma and revictimization for victims coming forward.

Second, trafficking and sex work are not synonymous and must not be conflated. Part of the work to stop conflating sex work with trafficking must include decriminalizing sex work. As you heard from Sandra Wesley from Stella, the term “trafficking” has been used to refer to multiple concepts that range from physical, sexual and labour abuses as well as child sexual exploitation. This conflation has the effect of obscuring the sources of marginalization and vulnerabilities that I identified earlier.

It also has resulted in harmful consequences for sex workers. Anti-trafficking measures that rely on policing and criminal sanctions do not address the sources of marginalization or inequality faced by people who are vulnerable to exploitation. Instead, they often make things worse, especially for sex workers who are targeted and pressured through these initiatives.

You have heard from groups like the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform and Sex Workers of Winnipeg Action Coalition about how conflating sex work and trafficking has resulted in targeted harassment and surveillance of sex workers by law enforcement and anti-trafficking investigations. These harms are compounded by current criminal laws that criminalize sex work. Criminalizing and characterizing all sex work as exploitative make it difficult to identify actual instances of exploitation. It also excludes sex workers from protections against labour exploitation that are available to other workers through employment and labour laws.

Finally, it is important to provide actual social and economic supports to people who are vulnerable to exploitation. These supports include income supports, social supports, affordable housing

and health supports that are accessible and barrier-free. These social and economic supports should be accompanied by changes to laws to remove vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers. For example, LEAF has called to repeal immigration regulations that prevent migrant sex workers from obtaining status or being allowed entry into Canada.

In sum, ending exploitation requires a systemic approach grounded in anti-oppression, distinguishing trafficking from sex work and providing concrete supports to eliminate sources of marginalization.

Thank you very much. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

• (1150)

The Chair: Fantastic. Thank you so much.

I'm now going to pass the floor over to the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform.

Angela Wu, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Angela Wu (Executive Director, SWAN Vancouver, Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform): Thank you very much.

My name is Angela Wu, and I'm the executive director of SWAN Vancouver, a member group of the alliance.

I am calling in today from the traditional and unceded territories of the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam nations.

For the last 20 years, SWAN has supported newcomer, migrant and immigrant women engaged in indoor sex work. We work to promote the health, rights and safety of these women through front-line services and systemic advocacy.

SWAN is also a member of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, an alliance of more than 80 organizations from around the world working to end trafficking. As such, we are deeply familiar with issues relating to both sex work and trafficking.

At SWAN, upholding sex workers' rights and addressing trafficking are not mutually exclusive. As the committee has heard from other witnesses about the problematic conflation of trafficking and consensual sex work, I will not spend too much time on this point. All I will say is that sex work and trafficking are complex issues, and when they are presented as the same thing, the result is an oversimplification, which has led to well-intentioned but ineffective and even harmful initiatives, policies and laws. Sex workers are bearing the brunt of these policies and laws, particularly sex workers from marginalized and equity-seeking groups.

I'd like to take this time to address two recurring suggestions I have heard in this committee for improving Canada's human trafficking response. Many witnesses have called for, one, increased training and public awareness campaigns about the realities of trafficking and, two, more resources directed to law enforcement as a solution to the problem. While I agree that public education is important for addressing social issues, right now, most anti-trafficking initiatives perpetuate misinformation that does a disservice to both trafficking victims and other marginalized groups. Human trafficking awareness training continues to use vague, overly broad and, frankly, often racist "red flags" or "indicators" that trafficking is occurring. These red flags can be applied to many situations that are not human trafficking, which often leads to people seeing trafficking where it isn't and, ultimately, wasting resources.

For example, a common red flag is that a trafficker will limit or restrict a perceived victim's ability to speak in public, or that someone will speak for them, when in reality, many of the women SWAN supports may not speak English, and it's normal for newcomers to have family members or support workers translate for them.

Furthermore, there is the unacknowledged role and complex interplay of gender, race, ethnicity, language and culture in establishing these red flags. For example, when a number of non-white, and especially Asian, sex workers who speak accented English work together, this work situation can be perceived as a case of trafficking, whereas the same conclusion may not be drawn about a group of white, Canadian-born sex workers.

Although SWAN works with women who are often perceived to be trafficked, it's important to note that we very rarely come across any cases with the hallmarks of trafficking, such as coerced work. Instead, we find that women we support face a spectrum of exploitation and/or violence in their work, most often directly as a result of the stigma and criminalization they face.

To the second point, also embedded in most anti-trafficking initiatives is the idea that law enforcement is a solution to trafficking. Repeatedly, women have told SWAN that they fear the police more than predators. This fear means that some of the most marginalized and systemically vulnerable women do not report violence or exploitation. Our current laws and policies meant to address trafficking are self-contradictory. How can we expect law enforcement to protect the very same people who are criminalized by the laws they enforce?

Along with many other witnesses, I urge the Government of Canada to fully decriminalize sex work by repealing the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, or PCEPA, as well as

the immigration and refugee protection regulations, which prohibit migrants from engaging in sex work. The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights has already recommended repealing the IRPR ban on sex work. We urge the members of this committee to reiterate this recommendation and to hold the Government of Canada accountable for following through on repealing these regulations, which actually put migrant women engaged in sex work in precarious and exploitative situations.

I ask the committee to think critically about the issue of human trafficking and to recognize that, while it is absolutely important to address, we do not have to jeopardize sex workers' lives to do so. It is not enough to say we understand the difference between sex work and trafficking if the resulting response continues to be anti-sex work at its core and puts sex workers in harm's way. If Canada's anti-trafficking approach continues to be anti-sex work, the most marginalized people in the sex industry will continue to be at grave risk of violence and exploitation.

Thank you very much for your time.

I look forward to answering any questions.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to move over to the Yukon Status of Women Council, and I'm going to pass the floor over to Jessica Stone.

Jessica, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jessica Stone (Project Manager, Yukon Status of Women Council): Thank you so much for this opportunity to speak today.

I'll start by introducing myself. My name is Jessica Stone, and I'm the project manager of the supporting workers' autonomy project Yukon at the Yukon Status of Women Council. We are located on the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

Our project provides direct services to people who trade sex in the Yukon, and we predominantly serve indigenous women, who inform and guide our project.

I'm going to speak today to the harms that emerge when we use bad or non-existent data to inform our understanding, our frameworks, our systems, our policies and our laws.

Many witnesses before this committee are testifying for the need for policy-makers to differentiate between sex work and trafficking. When gender-based violence data is produced through a framework that conflates sex work and trafficking, all sex work is understood and defined as violence.

To be clear, we are not suggesting changes to the human trafficking laws per se, but we are asking to stop using the language of human trafficking in these studies to understand a broad range of violence. This conflation is not simply performative. By calling so many different kinds of violence "human trafficking", you are obscuring the realities of those different kinds of violence. The human trafficking approach does not recognize the layered and complex violence that sex workers experience, most of which is not human trafficking. This causes harm in a multitude of ways.

Firstly, bad data practices are amplified. There is a fundamental difference between the act of sex work and the act of violence against a sex worker. Secondly, by requiring sex workers to identify as victims of trafficking to receive support, the data gets skewed. In turn, the number of people who are reported as being trafficked gets inflated. This invisibilizes the realities of human trafficking and enables an increase in funding towards anti-trafficking initiatives and policing, which then perpetuates this cycle.

This is a critical point for this committee to recognize in their recommendations: Human trafficking cannot be used as a framework for such a broad range of violent experiences.

Sex workers have agency to do sex work, and sex workers also experience violence. Sex work laws need to be repealed in order for violence against sex workers to be reduced. This is a clear recommendation to this committee. Autonomy and agency are consistently ignored with respect to sex work, and this hypocritical framework deters people who sell sex from accessing safety. It deters them from reporting occurrences of gender-based violence and enables the continual hemorrhaging of taxpayer dollars into systems that are largely ineffective.

Lastly, the anti-trafficking narratives used not only within this committee but within policies and practices at large are rooted in racist, infantilizing language and ideologies. Without addressing such colonial and patriarchal origins, indigenous, Black, migrant and other racialized workers will continue to experience a disproportionate amount of harm from the enforcement of these policies.

Indigenous communities have been very clear—police training is not what is needed, but rather support to the communities themselves.

In conclusion, when all violence experienced by sex workers is mislabeled and understood as trafficking, we create a false narrative and we perpetuate harm.

I'm going to break it down very simply here. There is a conflation between sex work and trafficking in the law and the application of a human trafficking framework. This conflation enables continued bad data collection practices that in turn emerge into

harmful practices and policies. The process that I'm describing here is self-reinforcing. It's a process that is essentially flawed by virtue of its being a closed system that fortifies itself.

From a logical standpoint it is invalid. From a methodological standpoint it is ineffective. The very thing that's required to build systems, policies and programs that have meaningful impact to reduce harm—that is, accurate and reliable information about the lived experience of people—are negated by this conflation of sex work and trafficking. We see this parallel phenomenon in the north often, where the lack of access to good, reliable data reinforces the continual building of bad or ineffective systems.

If we do not have an accurate picture of the violence experienced by sex workers, we are going to continue to be unable to be effective in addressing it. Sex workers have repeatedly voiced the need to stop conflating sex work and trafficking. Sex workers are clear in reporting how violence is enacted upon them and who the violence is largely stemming from. If government and law enforcement are named as perpetrators of violence, there needs to be accountability from stakeholders and meaningful engagement with sex workers to create effective policy, law and supports that seek to reduce harm, not create it.

Thank you. I look forward to the opportunity to answer your questions.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll be starting with our first round of questions of six minutes each.

I'm 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.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us today to talk about human trafficking of women and girls.

This is a very difficult subject to discuss. We're finding it extremely difficult. After hearing your testimony this morning, I'm having a bit of trouble getting my head around it. This committee has been hearing a lot of things for some time now.

Ms. Stone, do you feel that there may be a pathway from consensual sex work to trafficking of women and girls? Is that happening?

Many of you this morning are clearly drawing a line between sex work and trafficking of women and girls.

Could the two realities intersect?

[English]

Ms. Jessica Stone: Thank you so much for your question.

I would respond with this. In all industries, including the sex work industry, there is the risk for exploitation and trafficking. When we are talking about addressing trafficking, as many people today have spoken to, we need to address inequalities across all industries, and we need to have the same protections and regulations that are available to workers in all other industries be available to those who work in the sex industry in order to reduce the vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking.

Again, we need to look at.... Exploitation and trafficking can exist in all industries, so that includes the sex industry. However, we need to ensure that there are protections and regulations available to sex workers so that there is recourse available if exploitation begins to happen to them.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you for your answer.

Ms. Stone, you stated that you had little data on the north. I can confirm to you, and my colleagues will support me on this, that we've had several stakeholders come before us and say that data is lacking across the country and it's hard to put a finger on exactly what trafficking involves, where it's occurring, who's responsible for it and so forth, and also to follow up with victims.

Ms. Price, my understanding from what you said about “sensationalism”—and I'm using my own words, not the exact words you used—is that the stigma does more damage than the offence itself, which would be the actual trafficking, for example.

Does that sum up your thinking correctly?

I may have misunderstood your notion of “sensationalism” and how we should respond to it.

• (1205)

[English]

Ms. Kate Price: Thank you for your question.

I find it confusing with the French and the English. I apologize.

I definitely do not believe, nor does ACT Alberta, that sensationalizing the crime is worse than the crime itself. It's strictly a concern we have heard from survivors and clients, who have communicated they were unsure if they should even reach out, because they felt their experience was not horrific enough to warrant services or horrific enough to warrant the risk of deportation or other fears of entering the system.

That's what I meant when I said sensationalizing can worsen an already terrible crime.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you, Ms. Price.

Do you feel that people have a solid grasp of what trafficking is, that it's clear?

[English]

Ms. Kate Price: Do you mean in this space today or within the Canadian culture?

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I mean in Canada. When we talk about trafficking, I feel like it's a situation that many people talk about without necessarily having the same baseline.

[English]

Ms. Kate Price: I agree wholeheartedly. I don't want to speak on behalf of anyone else on the call, but I heard similar thoughts from them as well.

Often, the way we define or perceive trafficking is wildly inaccurate compared to what we're seeing on the front lines. Certainly, what sex workers who are doing consensual sex work have communicated is vastly different from the clients we're working with who've experienced sexual exploitation.

I would agree, or would fairly confidently confirm, that rarely do we understand the true definition of “trafficking” and what it looks like.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you.

Ms. Wu, you stated that victims fear the police more than their predators. That's a significant statement, and it's not very reassuring.

Could you tell us a little more about it?

[English]

Ms. Angela Wu: Again, repeatedly the women we support at SWAN tell us that they actually fear the police more than they fear predators. This is due to the IRPR provisions that prohibit sex work. They are not able to access justice as freely as the rest of us can because they live in fear of being arrested, detained and deported if they are found to be engaging in sex work as temporary residents in Canada.

That being said, I think this is actually quite a common feeling among sex workers. Ultimately, sex work is criminalized in Canada, and—

The Chair: Perfect. I'm going to switch it over to Anita Vandenberg. She has the next six minutes.

Anita, you have the floor for six.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much to all of you for being here. I have a question for the four of you, but before I do that, I want to pick up on something that you said, Ms. Stone. One thing we've looked at in this study is data and how difficult it is to get accurate data, which then can inform policy decisions and evidence.

You put forward an even greater difficulty when you talked about the fact that, by including so many types of violence under the label of human trafficking, we're not actually able to capture the data of what is really happening there. I wonder if you can elaborate a little bit on that and what we may be able to do about it.

Ms. Jessica Stone: Of course. Thank you so much for your question. Yes, it's definitely a matter of recognizing the data gaps, especially as they exist in rural and remote northern regions such as the Yukon.

You know, I think most importantly we need to invest in funding that is community-driven. To do this, we need to provide core funding and long-term funding to non-profit organizations. This can support developing their capacity, which in turn enables them to strengthen their policies, procedures and data collection practices.

With this funding in place to develop capacity in data collection, storage and analysis, especially for those in the north, non-profit organizations will be able to generate more reliable data. As we know, that trust that exists between non-profits is often quite different from what exists between larger stakeholders that are typically doing data collection, such as governments or other formalized institutions.

With this reliable data that can be generated if we provide that capacity building to non-profits, we'll then have a clearer picture of what's going on. That can better inform services, policies and practices that meet the needs and represent the needs of the community.

Again I would just reiterate that we need to provide funding to those institutions outside of those large institutional stakeholders so that the data collected can be more accurately representative of communities, and then we can get a clearer picture of what our response needs to look like.

• (1210)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you so much. It's a very good recommendation.

I have a question for the four of you, maybe in the order that you spoke. We've heard from other witnesses, and particularly today, about the need to have a survivor-focused frame to look at this. I've heard words like "autonomy", "agency" and "empowerment".

Ms. Price, you used the term "human rights"—talking about this as a human rights issue, as opposed to some of the things we hear about victims and colonial frames that have been mentioned a few times.

Ms. Price and Ms. Wu, you both talked about stigma, both in terms of how we view those who are facing exploitation but also, after they try to leave, the stigma they might face in society.

I know it's a big question, but could I ask each of you to comment for 30 seconds on what we can do to make sure that, when we

make our recommendations, we are looking at it through the survivors' eyes and not through the stigmas and misperceptions society may have?

I'll start with you, Ms. Price.

Ms. Kate Price: That's a big one for 30 seconds.

I believe someone else used the word "infantilizing". I think that's a really accurate term for something that immediately disempowers someone who has agency and autonomy and is a whole person who has gone through something terrible. I think that infantilizing survivors is adding to the stigma. It's just someone who had an experience that was terrible. They need supports, and that crime has to be addressed.

The individual is not a broken thing. They are a fully empowered person who can determine what they need and what their care plan should be, with the support of other professionals. I believe that would support the reduction of stigma.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Ms. Kim, go ahead.

Ms. Rosel Kim: Thank you.

I would add that I think we need solutions that support and don't punish the people coming forward. Giving a survivor agency means providing them with options, providing them with time to choose an option that works for them and making sure that option doesn't lead them to any kind of additional punitive measures, such as being stuck in a system where they might have to identify as something they don't want to—a victim. Rather, they are able to get the support they need on their own terms.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Go ahead, Ms. Wu.

Ms. Angela Wu: I would add that this goes back to the idea that "human trafficking" is used as a term to label so many different things. The women we support face a spectrum of exploitation on which trafficking might be the most extreme.... When they are seeking help and being asked, "Are you a victim of trafficking?", they're not able to answer that. If they do, in our experience, and they answer honestly that they chose to do this work but are facing exploitation, they are often disregarded as no longer a victim. That often leads to punitive measures against them.

I think stigma runs through the language we use and the framework we use. The human trafficking framework isolates and eliminates certain people from accessing supports. I agree with Ms. Price about using a human rights approach. It's much more effective than a human-trafficking framework.

The Chair: Thanks very much. We're past our six minutes by a few seconds already.

I'm going to pass it over to Andréanne Larouche.

Andréanne, you have six minutes.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses who are joining us virtually. I will certainly have the opportunity to ask them questions, but I'll start with you, Ms. Price, as you are here with us. Thank you very much for coming.

All the testimony has been fascinating today. We've heard different points of view, but that presents us with facets about which we've perhaps heard less here on the committee. I'm thinking in particular of your answer to a question Ms. Vandenberg asked a little earlier about stigma.

You didn't have time to talk a lot about that. This is the first time I've ever heard so much about the sensationalistic way people talk about human trafficking, in advertising or in the news. That causes a distortion between the numbers we have and the reality you're seeing in Alberta.

I'd like more clarification on that. I'll give you the opportunity to go a little further and complete your answer to Ms. Vandenberg's question.

[*English*]

Ms. Kate Price: I think there is always going to be a divide between the statistical data, which—as many folks have mentioned today—is, unfortunately, deeply flawed. There's going to be a gap between the statistical data and the lived experience and testimony of survivors. The stigma folks are experiencing when they're trying to communicate that something has happened to them and they've been exploited in different ways.... There is stigma culturally, but there's also stigma because there are literal punitive impacts, like being highly at risk of deportation from just wanting to report their abuser or from entering the system in any way.

When we talk about stigma.... Yes, there is a significant cultural stigma—specifically around sexual exploitation, consensual sex work and sex trafficking—that is very much ingrained in Canadian society. However, there's also stigma towards folks who have experienced labour trafficking, where people think, “Why couldn't they just leave?” That stigma is a question that I suspect many folks have brought up to this panel—the “why didn't they just leave?” question. The fact that this question is still coming up suggests the widespread presence of stigma.

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Yes, it does answer my question. We can come back to it anyway, because I'm going to continue along the same lines.

Some witnesses have told us that the victims, the survivors, were afraid to report it to the police because they believed that was dan-

gerous—it goes as far as that. They fear being blamed or humiliated. That's more or less what you're talking about, stigmatization.

About 80% of human trafficking cases are not reported to law enforcement. Some survivors have also expressed concerns about the police being able to get them out of human trafficking situations, due to travel across jurisdictions and possible internal bias. They are worried about being judged when they ask for help, and they are worried about their safety and even the safety of their loved ones.

How does this lack of trust in the system undermine assistance to victims of trafficking and the way they are dealt with?

[*English*]

Ms. Kate Price: I want to start by saying that I know that law enforcement are coming from a good place and they're trying to do the best job they can. It's a flawed system.

When we talk about creating anti-trafficking training, it has to also include nuanced training for law enforcement to understand the difference between consensual sex work and sex trafficking and to understand a trauma-informed response—that is, how to talk to someone who has experienced extreme trauma and is currently in crisis. Without that level of training I think most frontline agencies...and it's certainly something we have experienced at ACT Alberta. We do our best to screen the law enforcement agents who we know will be engaging with survivors. We're fortunate enough to have incredible partners whom we trust, but we screen them because trauma-informed care isn't part of the RCMP's mandatory training, to my knowledge.

There is a cultural response that is an element of it. The other side of it is the fact that the systems and laws in place, and the way that we handle people with precarious status in Canada, is such that speaking to law enforcement may risk further trauma out of the gate. They may literally be deported before they can even access any services.

There are multiple things that I think many folks on this panel have covered. Ms. Stone brought up some great points about legalities and the legal structure. I'm sorry; that was Ms. Kim. We have to look at the cultural practices and the training but also the larger legal structures that have an immediate effect on folks seeking support.

I'm not sure if I completely answered your question. Did I?

• (1220)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: All right, Madam Chair.

Yes, that answers my question, Ms. Price.

There's also the issue of trust, the word that comes to mind. Victims must be able to trust in the fact that we have laws in place and that all stakeholders are working effectively together. They must also be able to trust that we rely on data based on science, not on stereotypes or preconceived notions. That's more or less what I understand.

What are your comments on this?

[English]

Ms. Kate Price: I would encourage digging down on how we're defining "trafficking" culturally with training but also in the law, and being very specific about how those terms are used. It will help the data quality if we're able to better articulate what trafficking is and is not.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you so much.

Leah, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming today. It's been very interesting.

Madam Wu, I liked that you were speaking about looking at things through a human rights framework. You spoke about repealing the IRPR, and I've been saying for a long time that when you make somebody illegal you place them in danger. One of the things that has been suggested is, for example, if somebody is involved in a sex trafficking case, the first thing that happens is that they get permanent residency so there is no fear of deportation. I am a big proponent for status for all, but that certainly has been one of the recommendations that has been given to the committee.

This is my question actually. How does keeping in place the IRPR infringe on the human rights of migrant sex workers and also others who may be sex-trafficked?

Ms. Angela Wu: Essentially the IRPR prohibition on sex work makes it impossible for migrants to Canada to choose freely what occupation they do. When they choose to work in the sex industry, they automatically are placed at risk of arrest, detention and deportation. We have actually seen that happen several times with the women we support.

Often they come to the attention of the police because they have decided that they want to report violence or exploitation. Unfortunately, almost every single time we have seen the women actually end up getting deported. It's really a backwards regulation, because I believe the provision was added to the IRPR to address trafficking. It was a deliverable, I believe, with the national action plan from a few years ago. Somehow, it was considered to be a way to address trafficking, but what we have seen is that, in fact, it actually pushes migrant sex workers deeper into the shadows and it limits their access to justice.

Ms. Leah Gazan: In saying that, going back to policing, I would argue that there are piles of systemic racism in policing, certainly as it relates to Black and indigenous people and people of colour. I know in the indigenous community it's a very contentious relationship, certainly in the city of Winnipeg. Another report came out

calling out the racism of the Winnipeg city police around the landfills and how blatantly racist that was. That was just this weekend.

In what ways do you think the federal government can support improvements in the reporting process? Is the system so flawed with systemic racism that we need to look at other avenues for reporting outside of the police to ensure the protection of sex workers and individuals being sex-trafficked?

• (1225)

Ms. Angela Wu: I think the big picture piece for this question is that we currently have laws that criminalize sex work, so how do people who are facing exploitation in the sex industry—which is what I understand this committee's main concern is—access justice when the police are actually meant to enforce these laws? They don't really have access to justice.

I heard in a different session that someone said that they know some police don't actually enforce the laws. They know when it's consensual sex work and they leave it alone. The reality is that sex work is criminalized. Just because some police might say they're not going to enforce this law doesn't really change how these women live their lives and operate. They still have to operate within the shadows as long as sex work is criminalized.

I think—

Ms. Leah Gazan: Just on that, you called for decriminalization. Again, I think when you make somebody illegal or criminalize them, you place their safety in jeopardy.

Is decriminalization a critical piece to ensuring safety?

Ms. Angela Wu: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Leah Gazan: In terms of options and in terms of the human rights lens—I've asked you all the questions this round; I'll ask other people—there is guaranteed livable basic income. That's a bill I'm pushing because we talk about choice, but we don't really give people a true choice. We don't have accessible, affordable rent geared to income. We don't have a guaranteed livable basic income.

If we want to address this in a real way, systemically, do you think that one of the ways to do it is to put in place a guaranteed livable basic income?

Ms. Angela Wu: Yes, absolutely. I think that is a big piece of it.

Like you said, it comes down to choice and the options that we have as people living in society and living in capitalism. I do believe that a universal basic income would make a big impact for people. However, I will say that it needs to be accompanied by decriminalization and destigmatization of working in the sex industry because some people might still choose to do it.

The Chair: Thanks very much. That's the end of the first round.

I'm just going to bring to everybody's attention that there will be a vote at 1:02, so the bells will be ringing in a couple of seconds. I'll put it in your minds because we're going to have to decide how we would like to continue. We can either continue and do this on-line, voting by app. Anita is just showing me how we can do it. It will be up to the committee, but there will be bells ringing very shortly, so we can either end to go for the vote or we can continue on for a few more minutes.

I'm going to start the second round, though. I'm going to pass it over to Michelle Ferreri.

Michelle, you have five minutes, or was it Anna?

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): We went back and forth, but we can go to Anna.

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

I know that Ms. Kim has gone. I'm going to ask a couple of questions and I just need to know if you have the answers.

I'm going to start with Kate.

Do you have any stats on female versus male sex workers—yes or no?

Ms. Kate Price: I don't. I actually think I'm the least qualified person on this panel to answer that question. I would encourage one of the other folks who works more directly with the sex-working community to respond.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Okay.

Ms. Wu, do you have any stats?

Ms. Angela Wu: I don't have any hard stats on this. The people we support at SWAN are primarily self-identified women, so we don't actually support males.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you.

Ms. Stone, it's the same question.

Ms. Stone, hello...? Did we lose her?

I'm going to go on to the next question then.

Ms. Price, I'm going to go back to you. Do you have any stats on the abuse between human traffickers and sex workers?

Ms. Kate Price: No.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Okay.

Ms. Wu, to you, it's the same question.

Ms. Angela Wu: I'm sorry, but can you clarify that question?

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Sure.

Do you have any stats on the number of individuals who are abused whether they are human traffickers or sex workers?

• (1230)

Ms. Angela Wu: I don't have any stats on that. I'll reiterate that SWAN has been working with this population for over 20 years. We very rarely come across someone who has been trafficked. I'm not sure if that answers your question.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: No, it doesn't.

Is Jessica Stone on the line now?

The Chair: We're working with her.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: All right. I'm going to go to my next question.

We heard from Timea Nagy. I'm not sure how many of you know who she is. She was a victim of human trafficking. She has helped guide very many young people out of that business. She'll actually be in Toronto tomorrow doing a presentation with CSBA. She is also highly recommended by the Peel Police with respect to how she's worked with them to educate them.

I'm also reading her book, which is very dark—I'm not going to lie. One of the things she shared with me was that it starts with human trafficking and then they get so enraged that they end up going into the sex trade because they have no other options because they feel belittled because they've been demoralized. These perpetrators and these abusers have demoralized them so that they just feel like less of a woman.

My question to you is this: As a woman, I think I have a lot to offer. I think in today's society, women have the option of going to school, of getting an education, of doing better. I know that Timea is a perfect example of getting out of this situation, going back to school, educating herself and educating other women.

I'll start with Ms. Price.

Do you agree that as women we can do better than just selling our bodies?

Ms. Kate Price: I believe that as women we can make that decision for ourselves.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: You're okay with that.

Ms. Kate Price: I'm not "okay" or "not okay" with anything. My point and really the priority of my showing up today was to communicate that it's for each individual to decide for themselves how they want to live their lives and to have the agency to do so. It's our job to try to address the systemic issues that are restricting their ability to do so.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Ms. Wu, what is your feedback on the opportunity that woman have today?

Ms. Angela Wu: I agree with Ms. Price 100% that we need to keep in mind that we don't actually get to decide for each of these people. They can decide for themselves. As Ms. Price said, everyone deserves to be safe no matter what their occupation is.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

No bells are ringing yet, so we're going to continue on this.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Chair, I would ask that you let me speak for 30 seconds.

I'd like to clarify the procedures. The vote will take place at around 1:03 p.m. In any event, our meeting is supposed to be over before that. I'm trying to understand what the issue is. We can let the bells ring for 30 minutes and end our meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're just continuing with our rounds. We'll deal with it very shortly.

Go ahead, Sonia.

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

I would suggest that we continue through the bells and adjourn when there's 10 minutes left. That is just my point.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing at this meeting on the human trafficking study.

My first questions will be directed to Ms. Wu.

Ms. Wu, what are some misconceptions about sex work that you think are harmful and that contribute to the problem of human trafficking?

Ms. Angela Wu: I think the main piece is that sex work is inherently exploitative; it is not. There are people who exploit and people who are exploited. However, the act of sex work is not in itself exploitative. I think that is the underlying misconception in all of our laws and policies in Canada. Our sex work laws.... The PCEPA preamble is based on the premise that sex work is inherently exploitative.

When we consider sex work to be inherently exploitative, it's like what other witnesses have been saying: It infantilizes the people who are doing it and who have chosen to do this work. It makes it seem as if they couldn't have possibly chosen this for themselves, or that they need to be rescued.

• (1235)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Price.

Ms. Price, we know from Stats Canada that nine out of 10 victims of police-reported human trafficking knew their accused trafficker. We've also heard in the committee that traffickers often pose as romantic partners to recruit.

Can you comment on whether you have seen this in Alberta, as well as any recommendation you might have for data collection?

Ms. Kate Price: We have absolutely seen this in Alberta. It's prevalent in the testimonials of the survivors and clients we have worked with. I certainly wouldn't say it's exclusively so, but it's certainly a higher percentage than you might think.

In regard to data collection.... That's challenging. It requires the survivor to feel safe enough to provide that level of detail to someone collecting data. That is an inherently flawed system—requiring

a survivor to share a highly painful testimonial in order for the data collection to be improved. I'm not entirely sure what recommendation to make, other than to further invest in community-based response services that are able to build trust and have a nuanced understanding of the regional and cultural needs of the individuals in question. They may be able to help and assist with data collection.

To Ms. Stone's earlier point, without the ability to have multi-year funding within an organization collecting this data—the inability to afford someone trained in a technical skill set, such as proper data quality and collection—this will continue to be a challenge, even if we consider prioritizing community-based responses to data needs.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Ms. Price.

We also heard about your free education program called “First Defense,” which goes over the signs of—or what to look for in detecting—human trafficking. Can you please give us an overview of what these are and how this program works?

Ms. Kate Price: We have a series of offerings.

What's not uncommon in Alberta and, I suspect, Canada is to have a human-trafficking one-on-one module that tends to be a one-hour “lunch and learn”. That can have pros and cons, because there's so much context to provide. It is very hard to provide a nuanced understanding of trafficking and how it impacts different communities in that hour, but we try. We do an online webinar for that, which is free and accessible for folks.

We also provide tailored training for industries. What we do is work with specific industries in, for example, transportation. We worked with the Edmonton International Airport to curate a multi-level training program that addresses how their team actually works. For example, if they have shift work, we can't do an in-person training session for everyone, so we do online modules in addition to in-person training, which we film. We try to train on identifying the indicators of trafficking—even that sentence is a highly flawed one, because indicators are so much more complicated than that. How do you identify signs of trafficking specifically in your industry? How do you safely respond? Does that mean reaching out to someone within your industry or job? Does it mean reaching out to the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, in order to seek a referral? Does it mean reaching out to a community resource—

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt.

The bells are now ringing. That means we have a vote in half an hour. I would need unanimous consent to carry on. I'm looking at all those in favour of carrying on.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We'll finish up at one o'clock today, which will give us time. That's fantastic.

We are done with that round. We're going into two and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Price, again, thank you for answering my initial questions.

I will now turn to Ms. Kim or Ms. Stone, who are joining us virtually.

As we've seen, the witnesses all agree that the federal government absolutely must work with organizations on the ground, police services and the provinces and territories to gather comprehensive data on human trafficking. We've already talked about the fact that the government must work collaboratively. I know that plans are in place, particularly those of the police services in the riding I represent, whether it be the Sûreté du Québec or the Granby police.

Ms. Stone, you work in the Yukon. How do you feel we can ensure that we work more collaboratively? What impact could that have?

Ms. Stone, I will ask you to answer first, and then Ms. Kim can complete your answer.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Ms. Jessica Stone: Thank you for your question, and I apologize for what I missed there. Unfortunately, the Internet in Yukon is not great, especially at 9:30 in the morning, so I apologize for being off for the last bit of the call.

Hearing what you were saying about all of the unique services, especially in a place like the Yukon, where is a reduced number of resources available given the population size we have here, we really need to be effective in creating a wraparound support service for people who've experienced all types of gender-based violence and for people who do sex work.

In our stance, this does include the police at this time. However, we must be considerate in that we are talking about violence, and we are being explicit when we name violence. We are not conflating sex work and violence, which has historically happened and has caused this tension between sex workers and policing.

That said, given the lack of resources we have in rural, remote and northern communities—and that's not just in Yukon, but that is where my experience lives—I believe we need to have all hands on deck and create this wraparound support service to create these formal and informalized support networks, so that people are able to have multiple options for access to safety.

The Chair: You have about five seconds, if you want to say thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Ms. Kim, I will let you reflect on what you'd like to say about this. There may be another round of questions, and you can share your thoughts with us if the opportunity arises.

[*English*]

The Chair: I love Andréanne. She and I with the time, I love it.

Leah, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much. My question is for Ms. Kim.

Ms. Kim, you spoke about anti-oppression. Could you share with the committee what an anti-oppression framework would look like for sex work and sex trafficking.

Ms. Kim...?

The Chair: She is not here. She has left.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay. Maybe I'll move over to Ms. Stone.

Ms. Stone, you spoke about conflating human trafficking and sex work. That's something I bring up often in committee, that conflating sex work, sex trafficking and, in fact, child sexual exploitation places people in harm. Can you expand on that a bit?

Ms. Jessica Stone: Yes, definitely.

When we are labelling all types of violence that happens to sex workers as trafficking, we don't have a clear image of what violence sex workers are actually experiencing. Much like how we see this play out in a court setting, when we don't use the accurate language to describe violence, we often minimize and hide the impact of the violence. Therefore, we are unable to address it as it happens.

It needs to be clear. There needs to be a clear and shared definition of trafficking, which I don't think we have achieved in this space or across the country. We also need to lean into recognizing individuals as the experts of their own experience and allowing people to use their own terms to define what they've experienced, so that we are able to be person-centred in our approach when responding to the violence and other experiences.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Centring individuals...you spoke about autonomy and agency. We've heard discussion about decriminalization.

Is decriminalization part of that for you, in terms of providing individuals with the autonomy to make decisions about their own bodies?

Ms. Jessica Stone: Absolutely. Decriminalization is the first step, and it's a very important step.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

We're now going to go into our next round.

Leah and Andréanne know how to really work those two and a half minutes out.

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

• (1245)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thanks so much, Chair.

Thank you, guys, for all being here. It's interesting testimony today.

I have a quick question, if I can, for Ms. Price.

You talked about sensationalizing human trafficking. I'm curious about your thoughts on social media's role with minors, and whether you think there should be implications around young people using social media or being exposed to social media who are highly vulnerable, or kids in general.

Ms. Kate Price: I want to answer this question, but I want to provide the context that ACT Alberta only serves individuals 18 years and older, so I'm not necessarily the expert on that particular demographic.

I will say the connection between online sexual exploitation and social media is very evident and the risks are absolutely there. However, I suspect that social media's not going anywhere, so it's about focusing on awareness-raising education and training in schools to ensure that youth understand what it means, how far photos can go and how invisible people can be on the other side of that screen.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I'd ask your personal opinion. Seeing what you see, do you think the age to use social media is too young?

Ms. Kate Price: I can't imagine a scenario in which we can control that, so I'm not sure if the question would warrant further action. Does that make sense?

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Yes. I think you can absolutely control it. If you have legislation in place, you change the age and parents are better educated.

This is a post today from Adam Grant. He said:

The earlier kids get smartphones, the worse their mental health as adults.

New study, 27k+ ppl: owning a smartphone younger predicts lower self-worth, motivation & resilience—and more sadness, anxiety & aggression—especially for girls.

I put that on the record, because it's something I think is a major contributor when we're having these conversations.

I want to touch on something my colleague Ms. Roberts was trying to delve into. She was doing a pretty good job, to be honest with you, but these are tough conversations and we have to scratch below the surface to have an honest conversation about a lot of these things.

My question to you is—and I'll go to Ms. Price, because you're in the room—given a choice, if somebody doesn't believe they are worthy of something more.... Choosing to be a sex worker I have

no judgment on one way or another, but do you think that is really what the first choice would be if given the opportunity for education or another job?

Sometimes, we have people who choose minimum wage jobs because they have no other choice. Do you think sex work is a choice?

I know it ties into your sensationalizing comment, but do you think, in a room of women who are sex workers, they would say, "Yes, this was my first and only choice, and my passion to fulfill in life"?

Ms. Kate Price: I can answer the first part of that question. The last question, I'm unable to answer, because I'm not a sex worker in that room with other sex workers answering it.

I would say that a wonderful way to answer that question would be to provide that level of access to education, affordable housing, safe choices and a reasonable living income to be able to then see what happens and see what people's decisions are.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: You don't know what your worth is if you don't know what your worth is. A lot of that is an intersectionality of income, circumstance and poverty, which we know. Thanks for that thoughtful answer.

The last question I would ask you is about empowering survivors. You touched on that.

If you could give one recommendation of the key thing we could do to empower survivors to break free, what do you think that would be?

Ms. Kate Price: It would be to ensure that when they reach out, they're listened to, and how they define their experience is listened to as truth, not as something to be interpreted through our own value systems, concerns and biases. I think by ensuring that the first point of contact—reaching out for services, wanting to report an abuser, just seeking safe housing—is thoughtfully designed to be trauma-informed and person-centred....

When they reach that point, the systemic legislation and other forces surrounding it should ensure that the individual isn't penalized for coming forward, such as deportation.

The Chair: Now I'll go over to Marc Serré.

Marc, you have the floor.

Are you going to give it to Jenna? I have Marc next on the list. You guys decide who you want to do it.

We have Marc for five minutes.

• (1250)

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

My question would be first for Madam Wu. We talked a lot about data collection or the lack of, and no definitions. Can you help us define that more, some of that bad data collection and what we can do, as a federal government, to ensure that we do this in a better way, because right now government data is not really good?

You mentioned community, and Ms. Stone also mentioned this. Can you start off, Ms. Wu?

Ms. Angela Wu: Sure. I think it comes back to the discussion about definitions. The way that human trafficking is currently defined is so overbroad and ambiguous that we are not able to actually tailor solutions to the actual problems. We cannot have a cookie-cutter solution that will fit for all of these different issues that are often being caught in the net of human trafficking. I think it really lies in the definition, because how can we find or collect reliable statistics without really knowing what it is we are looking at?

I'm sorry. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Marc Serré: Ms. Stone, you mentioned the definition aspect and the data, and that skewing our complete support and work. Can you enlighten us on what recommendations you would have for us as a federal committee?

Ms. Jessica Stone: Definitely. As so many before us today have said, it's really meaningfully including people who trade sex and people who are survivors of trafficking in your development of a unanimous definition of trafficking. Again, as Angela was saying, this overbroad definition that's including multiple types of violence outside trafficking is what's informing our current systems, and that's unreliable data. I think it is important to recognize that this has been finally recognized at a federal level.

When we look at the national action plan and gender-based violence federal government website, we see that even they are now formally recognizing the lack of disaggregated or reliable data, especially in rural and remote northern communities. A quote, verbatim, from the government's website for NAP says, "The statistics...reflect the national picture, however, instances of [gender-based violence] vary across Canada. There are challenges and gaps in collecting consistent and detailed data". It continues on to say, "A further challenge is the lack of data to support the use of an intersectional lens, which recognizes that people often experience multiple oppressions due to the combined effects of systemic discrimination".

It's within reach for the government to dive further into their own recognition of this lack of data and to look at, again, including multiple community partners to ensure that the data moving forward is more reliably informed.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you. I'm sorry, but I have limited time.

Ms. Price, you talked about research and other...but I just want you to talk a bit about the importance of listening to survivors and to community organizations versus some governments or agencies that will project their own biases into this conversation and pass judgment.

Can you talk a bit about how that is affecting the conversation, this not listening to organizations and survivors?

Ms. Kate Price: I think the conversation around data is actually a perfect example. Think about a survivor who has experienced trafficking and goes through the terrible process of having to tell their story to two, five or 10 people before accessing the services they need. By the time they're at a point, with a representative from a government or frontline agency, for that data to be collected... Let's say they haven't experienced trafficking, but they're a consensual sex worker who experienced exploitation. The person they're talking to hears "sex trafficking", and they check that box and it gets added to the system.

Bias has a very profound effect on how we collect data, which then has a profound effect on where we invest funds into law enforcement and also frontline engagement. Training in data collection within frontline or community-based agencies would be transformative in the ability to provide a nuanced understanding of what an individual is saying happened to them.

• (1255)

The Chair: Fantastic. Thanks so much.

With the committee's permission—I'm looking at the time and we're down to about three and a half or four minutes—I was just hoping that I could ask a question, as the chair, and just ask it of everybody, and then we can call it a day.

Is everybody okay? The chair is asking a question.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. Thanks, everybody.

I would really like to thank you all. This has been a really good conversation. Specifically, we do try to figure out... We understand that some individuals are sex workers, but we also understand that many people have been exploited. I really want to focus on the youth, focus on that 12-year-old young girl who has been exploited, because those are the numbers we're hearing from the human trafficking.

I'm coming to you. When we talk about definitions, can you provide a potential definition specifically looking at the age category of under the age of 18, because I do not think sex work would be something for a child the age of 17 and under, so what would be a definition for sexual exploitation, these types of things, human trafficking, in the form of somebody under the age of 18? Can you provide me a definition?

I'm going to start with Ms. Price, and then go to Ms. Wu and then Ms. Stone.

Ms. Price.

Ms. Kate Price: Anyone under the age of 18 who is engaging in sex work is considered exploitation.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks very much.

Ms. Wu.

Ms. Angela Wu: Yes, I believe we already have a definition for this population, which is child sexual exploitation. I think it stands distinct from human trafficking.

The Chair: Ms. Stone.

Ms. Jessica Stone: I would echo, in full, Ms. Wu's statement.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

I just really wanted to do that, because that's one of the biggest challenges we're having right now.... We do understand, and I hear you today, but especially when we're looking at youth, to me, it is

absolutely exploitation. We know of 12-year-olds being sold on the streets. We know of 12-year-olds doing random acts of sexual deeds because they have been exploited, so I think we really need to look at those vulnerable populations.

Once again—I'm putting my chair's hat back on—I would really like to thank all of you for being here as our witnesses today.

We're winding up this incredible study. On Thursday, we'll return. We will have the minister for one hour. She will be here to talk about the main estimates. The second hour is going to be on this study.

Seeing no objections, we'll adjourn.

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