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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1530)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 64 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

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

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

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

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

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For those on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function.

In accordance with the committee's routine proceedings concerning connection tests, I am informing the committee that everybody has been tested and that all is well.

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

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

I would now like to move on to our first panel.

I would like to welcome, from the Angels of Hope Against Human Trafficking, Derrick Flynn, who is the board chair. From the Sudbury and Area Victim Services, we have Tiffany Pyoli York, anti-human trafficking coordinator and public educator. From the

Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon, we have Kathleen Douglass, president-elect and advocacy chair, and she is with Melissa Marchand, who is a member of the Zonta advocacy committee.

We will start by providing each group with five minutes. When you see my hand start going like this, please wrap it up. That means you have 15 seconds or less.

I'm going to hand it over for the first five minutes to Derrick Flynn.

Derrick, you have the floor.

Mr. Derrick Flynn (Board Chair, Angels of Hope Against Human Trafficking): Madam Chair and honourable committee members, thank you for providing us the opportunity to present here today on the issue of human trafficking.

I'm here representing Angels of Hope Against Human Trafficking. We're a grassroots community-based organization located in Sudbury, Ontario. Since 2015, Angels of Hope has provided trauma-informed long-term support to over 300 human trafficking survivors and their families. Angels of Hope is the only organization in northern Ontario dedicated exclusively to supporting human trafficking survivors.

Sex trafficking survivors require specialized trauma-informed care to successfully exit from being exploited, reclaim their agency and rebuild their life. The process of escaping and recovering from sex trafficking is complex, highly nuanced and never linear. Once removed from being exploited, it can take an average of seven attempts to successfully exit the sex industry due to ongoing vulnerabilities, trauma bonds and lack of safe and secure shelter.

In addition to broken promises and lack of resources, far too often a survivor's restorative journey is sabotaged by someone's lack of awareness and understanding of the survivor's mindset and trauma that they've endured.

Trauma-informed care is much more than making a survivor feel good or treating them with kindness. It's not a catchphrase, a check mark on a website or a certificate on the wall.

The anti-human trafficking movement is being inundated with self-appointed experts who view human trafficking as fertile ground for grants and funding opportunities. These organizations hang out their open-for-business sign with absolutely no human trafficking experience, and particularly not in working with survivors of trafficking.

Many of these organizations consider the needs of sex trafficking survivors secondary to their fundraising efforts, their career aspirations, notoriety and social or political status. This destroys lives and puts survivors' lives at risk. Funding must be prioritized to go directly to support survivors.

Survivors communicate through their behaviours, yet despite all of the investment in education and awareness training, the majority of our survivors tell us of their experience with ignorance; apathy; social and racial stigmatization; and incompetence, corruption and exploitation among law enforcement, the justice system, doctors, nurses and social services workers. In addition to ongoing education and awareness training, the necessary paradigm shift to change this is only possible through educating those entering these professions.

Angels of Hope is excited to provide human trafficking workshops to the next generation of legal professionals, including university law studies, with the objective of building survivor confidence in the criminal justice system and inspiring legal professionals to understand the survivors' mindset and empower them to seek justice.

Survivors are very clear about why they don't trust or report to the police and are unwilling to testify against their trafficker. The following is a quote from an indigenous survivor whose daughter was trafficked and ultimately murdered. This excerpt can be found in our report entitled "Increasing Access to Justice for Survivors of Human Trafficking".

When my daughter passed away, the justice system was so awful. I remember calling the police to verify if it was my daughter that they found, and the police officer right off the hop says, "Well, did you know that your daughter was a prostitute, she was on drugs and she jumped out of a window?"

At that time, I was able to put in a police report about her ongoing exploitation and abuse. The police officer just got a slap on the wrist and had to take cultural sensitivity training.

I think that is a major expression of how Indigenous women are treated in the justice system.

Survivors believe it's unsafe to report to the police because of known cases of corruption and fear of being victim-blamed and shamed. It's estimated that about 80% of human trafficking cases go unreported to the police.

Some survivors also expressed a deep concern about police being unable to get them out of trafficking situations because of the movement across multiple jurisdictions, internal bias or judgment when seeking help, and the safety risk to themselves and their loved ones.

Most people underestimate the significant dangers to those being trafficked, their families and other girls associated with the victim. Abuse and torture such as burns, cuts, breast and genital mutilation and anal and vaginal penetration with foreign objects are just some of the unspeakable horrors that these survivors experience.

It's time to get serious about tearing down territorial silos and work collaboratively to build comprehensive human trafficking crime data to develop polices, protocols and generously funded programs that allow us to directly serve the long-term healing journey, recovery and basic needs of human trafficking survivors.

We're making progress, but there's a lot of heavy lifting yet to be done.

● (1535)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm now going to move it over to Sudbury and Area Victim Services.

Tiffany, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York (Anti-Human Trafficking Coordinator and Public Educator, Sudbury and Area Victim Services): Melanie, Deanna, Holly, Faith, Shayna, Megan.

Bonjour. Aaniin. Boozhoo. Hello, Madam Chair and House members.

My name is Tiffany Pyoli York and I'm the anti-human trafficking coordinator and public educator for Sudbury and Area Victim Services. I'm also the chair of the anti-human trafficking coalition in greater Sudbury.

I'm here to speak about human trafficking through the victims' and survivors' voices, which I have been entrusted to share. I brought a ribbon with the names of victims and survivors and those who didn't survive whom I've encountered over the past two years.

Jasmine, Alicia, Ivory, Summer and Heaven.

I can spend my five minutes sharing the accolades for the amazing work that we've done in Sudbury and surrounding areas, but more importantly, I'm here to ask for more, because the people deserve more.

Our women, girls and gender-diverse people deserve more than a common shelter bed where they wonder if the person next to them is coming to retrieve them for their trafficker. They deserve more than 20 counselling sessions. After all the atrocities and abuses that they've endured, they shouldn't have to give up their pets.

These may seem like small, trivial things to those who have stability in their lives, but to the person who is finally able to exit human trafficking, those are the things that can help a person move into rehabilitation from the most heinous life instead of returning to it, which they often feel is their only option, due to the guilt and shame from the abuses they have suffered.

Tina, Marissa, Madison, Joanna, Brandy.

I'm asking you, as change-makers for our country, to share the voices of our women, girls and gender-diverse people who are screaming out for ongoing assistance, because human trafficking and its aftermath don't go away. It's not a matter of a simple rescue; it's ongoing medical and dental care. It's ongoing support for prolapsed uteruses from sexual assaults. It's painful implant surgery as a result of knocked-out teeth. It's ongoing therapy and supports for when the time comes that a victim and survivor's pimp is released from jail.

An average police investigation for human trafficking in Sudbury takes 360 days before charges can even be laid.

Chloe, Drew, McKenna, Jesse, Patricia.

Drugs can only be sold once, whereas a human being can be sold over and over again.

Human beings are not to be discarded, yet the correlation between missing and murdered indigenous girls, women and two-spirited people is too stark to ignore. Tomorrow, on the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People, effect change and do your part to stop human trafficking. Stop our sisters from being stolen and return our loved ones to their homes.

Ashlee, Hannah, Steph, Alex, Kim.

The four school boards in Sudbury have agreed to an anti-sex-trafficking protocol in which every student from grade 7 to grade 12 will receive the very same preventive education and empowerment messaging. At Sudbury and Area Victim Services, our hope is to share the resources that we have created and to have all-party agreement and support for a national protocol for all Canadian students to receive the same anti-human-trafficking preventive education and empowerment messaging as the Sudbury model.

Stats Canada shared that the highest rates of human sex trafficking occur in Nova Scotia, Ontario and Saskatchewan, which is an illustration that this is a national issue from the Prairies to the Maritimes and in every town and city in between.

Kya, Mackenzie, Ashley.

Do four to five years change a person?

In four years, a trafficker may be released from jail on the very same day that a victim and survivor's child starts kindergarten. In four to five years, a survivor may be starting a nursing school placement on the very same day that their trafficker is released from jail. In four to five years, a survivor may be graduating from rehab on the very same day that their trafficker is released from jail. In four to five years, a victim may have died from suicide because they couldn't face a world where their trafficker was free.

Please take this into account when you consider the minimum sentencing for the heinous crime of trafficking in persons, whether that be sex trafficking, labour trafficking or the trafficking of organs.

• (1540)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Tiffany.

I'm now going to pass it over to the Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon. Kathleen, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Kathleen Douglass (President Elect and Advocacy Chair, Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon): Hello, my name is Kathleen Douglass. I am long-time member of Zonta, and I am joined by my colleague, Melissa Marchand, a member of our advocacy committee.

For background, Zonta International is a service organization with over 100 years of service in building a better world for women and girls. We hold consultative status with the United Nations and support global sustainable development targets 5.2 and 8.7, which both address the issue of forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking.

Zonta has a history of tackling the issue of sex trafficking, going back to the sexual enslavement of women and girls in the 1990s Bosnian war, when we financially supported local aid organizations to provide recovery services for survivors.

We know that the multi-billion-dollar global business of human sex trafficking has surpassed gun and drug trafficking for the first time in history. This speaks to the urgent need to address this heinous crime.

Unfortunately, Ontario accounts for more than half of the cases in Canada. Even more regrettably, the GTA, including Peel, is a sex trafficking hub. All of this is in our own backyard. You have the relevant data, so instead let me share with you our community perspective.

The Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon, a very small service group, has been an active member of the Peel human trafficking network committee since its formation, the only volunteer organization amid the service-providing professionals. We contribute our time, energy, and funds to the work being done by these committed specialists.

Our club advocacy strategy has a two-pronged approach.

The first part is service. Our members volunteer at the local bingo hall twice a month to raise funds to distribute back to the community. Over the past few years, we have contributed over \$100,000 to local organizations affiliated with the anti-trafficking effort. The funding has addressed gaps in various programs, such as victim services, emergency services and housing.

The second part of our approach is raising awareness. We conduct social media campaigns and host community awareness events where we feature experts who can speak directly to the very real impact of trafficking in Peel. The 16 Days of Activism event this past November focused on awareness of the rapidly growing cases of trafficking, specifically in the Peel region, and a call to action to speak up and speak out.

Inevitably, the guests at these events leave somewhat shaken and sometimes angered, but always educated by something that they didn't know existed in our otherwise safe world. Feedback we have received includes "I would never guess that this was such an issue", "I am relieved to know that there are people who are willing to do something about this", or even "This is me."

During the pandemic, we didn't rest. We hosted online educational presentations, panels and symposia on the topic of gender-based violence and trafficking. We sponsor secondary school groups called Z clubs, which raise awareness and inform peers—the prime target age group for trafficking—through programs, events and activities that promote access to education, resources and support.

Our small but mighty group has inspired and supported other Zonta clubs and members across the country to educate themselves, spread the word, donate and advocate on behalf of those whose voices have either been silenced or not been heard. In Peel, we pursue advocacy from an all-inclusive perspective, whereby we learn together, commit to a common cause and then go beyond listening. We take action.

What we have learned, and what we believe would be the next best step in the prevention and mitigation of human trafficking, is more community awareness; education through the secondary schools, perhaps built right into the curriculum; and continued sustainable funding for the current projects that make a difference in the lives of those whose names we will never know.

Our newest club member is Lena. She's a trafficking survivor, and I would like to relate her words: "Being trafficked can cause severe trauma and survivors often need intensive, specialized services and support to rebuild their lives and these services are delivered through non-profits who have active voices and advocates of justice for women and men impacted by the sex industry and assisting them in finding necessary support that will aid them in their journey to safety, healing, and restoration."

Respectfully, Zonta is one of those non-profits with an active voice, as we promote awareness, challenge stigma and encourage action through our advocacy commitment.

• (1545)

We thank you for the opportunity to share with you from a community perspective, a volunteer perspective and a human perspective.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are now going to start with our rounds of questioning. Our first round is six minutes.

I am going to pass the floor now to Dominique Vien. Dominique, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I also welcome each and every witness and thank them for coming to meet with us today.

My first questions are for Mr. Flynn.

I'd like you to tell us more about tearing down territorial silos, which you mentioned earlier. You said it would be advisable, because it could significantly improve the sad situation of human trafficking.

What did you mean by that, exactly? To which situation were you referring?

[*English*]

Mr. Derrick Flynn: There are several situations with the silos we have. There are incredible people all over Canada who are working in this area, but we work within our own spheres. Things are changing, but different police organizations....

For example, we had a case just recently. If you are a trafficking victim or a survivor here in Ottawa and you are being moved between different jurisdictions, oftentimes with the links between different police agencies, organizations and victim services organizations there are jurisdictional boundaries that complicate things, and although you can work it out maybe a day or two down the road, when it's three o'clock in the morning and you're trying to save a girl's life and get her to safety or some kind of a shelter.... We need to tear that down so that there is collaboration among all of those agencies.

It is not only that. From a data perspective, we all need data, and nobody is really getting serious about, first of all, identifying the different forms of trafficking and identifying the data that is vital to legislators. When we come with our hand out saying we need help funding this, that or the other thing, we need to have good, sustainable, credible data to provide. We don't have that right now.

We've got the human trafficking hotline—it's fantastic—and we've got each of the local victim services agencies, and that's fantastic. All the different social services groups have their individual data, but we're not working together to share that data. If I had to ask somebody today how many girls called, we would not be able to provide that answer.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I have to interrupt you, because I have very little time and many questions.

That's similar to what the committee has already been told about jurisdictions, the hold different organizations have over jurisdictions. You talked about the police, but there are all the provincial jurisdictions as well. Obviously, we'll have to broaden our scope for victims to be safe.

You said that 80% of cases aren't reported. How can we deal with that? How can we help women who have trouble filing a report because they're afraid and don't trust the police?

What recommendation could the committee develop to change things?

[*English*]

Mr. Derrick Flynn: Thank you for that question. It's a great question.

In what we do at Angels of Hope, the number one most important thing is the safety and security of the survivor, and that of her immediate family and anybody in our network. That's the number one thing.

Then we provide services that allow her to look after her health needs. We provide a wraparound assessment in terms of what her overall needs are. Maybe there is a criminal justice system element to that too, but ultimately we provide a set of services that make them feel safe and empowered so that if and when they're ready, maybe they'll testify against their trafficker. Maybe a week down the road they've got their stuff together and they're ready to talk to the police and they're comfortable doing that. We provide the safety and security net and services for them in that immediate time.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I had other questions to ask you, particularly on organizations that get funding and shouldn't. I'd like your comments on the subject. Maybe one of my colleagues will ask the question.

In your opinion, Ms. Pyoli York, do we stop perpetrators relatively quickly? Many witnesses told us that they basically get away with it, often with just a little slap on the wrist.

[*English*]

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York: Thank you for that question.

Based on the information we get from our survivors and our victims and the family members of those who don't survive, that very small minimum of four to five years is what we're seeing for the traffickers who are put away on that charge.

In that time, all of our feedback is that we haven't had anybody—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Ms. Pyoli York, do you think sentences are too lenient?

[*English*]

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York: Absolutely not. We hear 100% from our victims, survivors and their family members that their healing process hasn't even begun by the time the trafficker is out of jail and looking for them.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: In fact, what I'm saying is that sentences aren't harsh enough.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks so much, Dominique.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Your time is up. I'm sorry. I know they're excellent questions, but your time is up.

I'm now going to move over to Sonia Sidhu. You have the floor for six minutes.

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

I want to thank all the witnesses today.

I know Zonta International is working very hard in Brampton. Thank you, Melissa, Kathleen and everyone who is appearing here today. Thank you so much for working hard on the ground.

I know Zonta has been actively involved in the sponsorship and organizations of Z Clubs in local high schools. The effort you have been making has been quite successful. We have heard in this committee that youth have been targeted online, especially during the pandemic, as you said in your statement.

Can you comment on the importance of reaching youth early on through prevention, Kathleen?

• (1555)

Ms. Kathleen Douglass: Thank you for that.

While I am not an expert, I'm a community supporter and ally. We have found that peer-to-peer knowledge is very successful. The Z Club members are leaders within their schools, so we find that when they present information sessions, when they conduct campaigns, when they work with groups like White Ribbon Campaign, those things are very successful because they're talking to their peers, who are at the prime target age to be groomed for trafficking. We have found that to be very successful.

These are efforts they are making on their own. It's not as if we are telling them what to do. They see the need, as we have identified, and they work with our Zonta Clubs to ensure that the information is out there and available in whatever form is appropriate. Whether it's through presentations, lectures or events, they are there talking to their peers about the dangers and the risks.

You are absolutely right. From everything we know and what we've heard from the professionals, the pandemic was absolutely a dangerous time for young people to be groomed for trafficking.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

In your experience, what are some unique challenges faced by survivors of human trafficking and how can these be overcome through targeted support and services?

Ms. Kathleen Douglass: Again, I'm not the professional. We have professionals here who can speak to direct experience.

However, we have learned and we have a member in our club who is a survivor. She, along with other survivors who have been speakers at our events, has spoken to us and shared with us. They will talk about the fact that it takes years to overcome the trauma and particularly the stigma, and to overcome the actual physical challenges they have, such as getting back into society, because they're looking for housing and looking to be well cared for in their health and looking, perhaps, to be re-educated.

Reintegration into the community is what we're hearing, which is why we support Ncourage, which is a hub to bring the survivors in to where they are first treated for the immediate needs they have. It's a triaged approach. Then they have transitional housing and then they look for third-stage housing.

We support those groups and find those opportunities to provide funding that fills in those little places that perhaps sustainable funding does not cover. We have heard from them that they are so grateful for the work that's being done, particularly in Peel, where they have very much coordinated their approach very successfully.

All the groups come together in the Peel human trafficking committee, and we work together, from the service providers to the groups that provide the actual boots on the ground—the Elizabeth Fry Society, for example. The Peel police are very responsive to the needs of our survivors.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

How could government policies be improved to better address the issue of human trafficking? What recommendation would you make to our committee on this topic? Anybody can answer.

Ms. Melissa Marchand (Member, Zonta Advocacy Committee, Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon): Our stance through Brampton-Caledon Zonta is that we would like to encourage a broader application of learnings through organizations like ours and ones that we see here today, in terms of fund development, advocacy awareness and education across the board to make it more impactful and sustainable, and in terms of mitigating the associated risks, because there are so many complex areas, as you alluded to, MP Sidhu, pertaining to mitigating the situation for youth from the beginning.

When it comes down to it, statistically, children who grow up in families where there's violence may suffer a range of behavioural and emotional disturbances that could also be associated with perpetrating and experiencing violence later in life, so we start at the root, at the youngest level possible, in terms of prevention and understanding, and also just in terms of awareness that the issue exists at all and that it is affecting and impacting children. One in three

cases of human trafficking involves children, according to the United Nations statistics.

Education is what we're advocating.

Ms. Kathleen Douglass: It should be right in the curriculum, starting from....

The Chair: In very gentle words.

• (1600)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

Madam Chair, do I have more time?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, probably just to wrap it up.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Does anybody else have a last comment on that?

The Chair: Thanks so much.

We're going to move over to Andréanne Larouche for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses for being here in person this afternoon to participate in the study, which isn't always easy. We've heard poignant testimony about the way victims are treated. We had the opportunity to get out in the field and visit organizations as part of the committee's mandate, and it's always chilling.

I'd like to start by highlighting that tomorrow is May 5. It's Red Dress Day. We will reflect on violence inflicted on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. This study leads us to a striking conclusion: women are affected disproportionately, but Indigenous women are affected even more. That's an aberration in 2023.

I'll turn to you first, Ms. Pyoli York. You yourself mentioned Red Dress Day. There were recommendations, reports and calls for action, specifically as part of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Could you talk about some calls for action or recommendations we're already aware of, but require political will to implement?

[*English*]

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York: Thank you very much.

We can look at all of the stats from StatsCan and the information we receive through our studies and all of the data, but I would say that 90% of the victims and survivors have been of indigenous descent, so I would challenge the numbers we have in our data, and I would challenge each and every person—not only members of Parliament, but anyone who is watching this or listening to this—to take those calls to action seriously. They're all important, every single one of them.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Indeed, there's over 200. It's pretty striking. We now have to determine which ones can be implemented.

Ms. Douglass, you talked about awareness campaigns on social media, but we know the federal government is also working on a bill to fight violence and hate online, as well as all abuses that happen on the web.

What's important to include in the bill and our recommendations? What would help fight both human trafficking and online recruitment?

Furthermore, during the pandemic, it migrated a lot to the internet. Do you have recommendations for a potential bill that could help victims?

[English]

Ms. Kathleen Douglass: Thank you very much for that.

One of the things we discovered was that young people listen to young people. It's fine for us to have grey hair, because we know everything, but the reality is that they listen to each other. Social media is their language. We must talk about human trafficking in their language, which is social media. It's TikTok and Instagram and all of the other programs they use and whatever will be coming in the next couple of years.

When we visited the airport, I think it was, we saw right in one of the bathroom stalls a big thing about human trafficking. That's great to see, but it's very benign. It's a passive approach.

What we need is to actually have some campaigns that address the challenges—what to look for and how to be careful, like not listening to the person who's love bombing you at the beginning and then turning to become your pimp. We really need to talk to them in their language, to be active in a social media campaign and to actually start instilling the fact that this is not just, “Oh, it could happen to somebody else.” This happens to our daughters, nieces and granddaughters. This happens in our own backyards. We need to help parents understand what the signs are. From everything we have studied and learned—and, again, we are not the experts and we rely on our experts to give us the information—we know that parents never believe it could happen to their children. We need to educate parents in campaigns to understand the signs and symptoms.

We need to educate the youth, who are the prime targets, to really understand what trafficking is. It is not just a nice boyfriend who's running into problems because he has somebody after him. We need to get to them actively in their own language.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: You're entirely right.

In airports, there is the #NotInMyCity campaign to show that it's not acceptable. However, that doesn't solve all the problems, as you pointed out.

You also talked about education. Prevention and help for victims are both necessary. There's a great deal of work to do to identify cases of human trafficking and better coordinate various relevant departments.

Mr. Flynn, I will raise the subject with you during my last round.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks so much. We'll get back to that.

Lindsay, you have the floor now for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you so much to all of the witnesses for coming here today.

I want to build upon what my colleague was just talking about. My colleague actually usually sits on this committee; I'm visiting once again. I used to sit on this committee. I miss it.

She put forward a motion in the House. It was adopted, and it was calling for the Red Dress Alert system. It would be very much like the Amber Alerts to help track better and, I think, talk about that disaggregated data that Mr. Flynn was asking for.

Can some of you talk about the importance of that Red Dress Alert system?

I don't know what order you want to go in.

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York: I can definitely speak to that.

I think, as we have all seen, the Amber Alert system has worked. We have it for a reason. As a country, we've adopted it for a reason, because it works.

There are huge numbers of missing and murdered indigenous girls and women. With that Red Dress Alert, people's names may not end up on this ribbon. Those are people who maybe are going to make it home and be survivors.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Do you think it could be part of that public education awareness you're talking about?

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York: Yes, absolutely.

I think if we bombard our kids, as Kathleen said, that's where our focus needs to be. The average age of entry into trafficking is 13 years old. I want you all to think about a 13-year-old in your life. Think about yourself as a 13-year-old. That is not what a 13-year-old should be worrying about.

Something we're really good at in Sudbury is that education piece. All of our kids in grades 7 to 12, in high schools and elementary schools, are getting the same streamlined messaging and empowerment that this is something that affects not only every single school board but every single student, school and teacher, and everyone in our communities.

When we have that same language and education and we really approach it as not just keeping yourself safe but also keeping the ones you love and care about safe as well, it really resonates with the kids. It really resonates with youth: “Maybe it's not going to happen to me, but I know enough to keep my friends safe.” That's something that really seems to resonate and work with the youth.

Whatever the method is, we will definitely go with the stuff that works.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I don't know if anybody else wants to pop in there.

Mr. Derrick Flynn: One of the things I have noticed, to reiterate what Tiffany said, is that identifying the different types of grooming and the stages of human trafficking is so critical. Most people don't identify themselves as being trafficked until after they are out.

I have had conversations with so many people who have said, "That would never happen to my kids. It's not in my backyard. It's not in my school." Then you sit with a 13-year-old girl, and she will say, "They were doing that to my friend. Is that what that was?"

It's having those generic conversations that are genuine. They will come forward and say, "Wow, that's what that was? That was happening to my friend." It's critical.

• (1610)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: One of the things that concern me, of course, is that we have seen a consistent defunding of women's shelters—we talk about that abuse—both provincially and federally.

Can you talk about how that's going to impact the organizations you work in specifically?

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York: Every day in the victim services office in Sudbury, we get a call for a case of intimate partner violence, domestic violence or human trafficking. Often either the shelter beds are full, or a human trafficking victim doesn't fit their mandate or their policies and procedures, or they are too high-risk—they cause an increase in security risk for other people staying in the shelter. What happens is that our victims and survivors of human trafficking are going to a low-barrier shelter instead of a domestic violence or intimate partner violence or human trafficking shelter, and that's only going to get worse.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: One of the cuts that were felt, I think, in the community.... You were talking about access to resources and about legal resources being available to victims. Legal aid is a huge part of that. There were some attempts by the federal government to bridge that.

Maybe each organization could talk about the impact that increasing the legal aid envelope at both levels of government would have for the people you serve.

The Chair: This is a very important question, but we have only 30 seconds, so if you want to get started on it, it would be great. Then we can add the extra at the end.

Ms. Melissa Marchand: I was just going to say that as part of Zonta, as Kathleen mentioned, we have over \$100,000 worth of funding available towards transitional housing for women and female-identifying persons. They are able to stay there for upwards of months at a time, depending on how long it takes for the case to be brought to where it needs to be to be resolved.

In terms of funding, this is very minimal on the spectrum of where it should and could be.

The Chair: That's perfect. We're going to carry on.

We're now going to go to our second round. It will be five minutes, five minutes, two and a half, and two and a half.

We will start with Eric Melillo for five minutes.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I would like to offer you the opportunity to finish your thought on that last question, if you want.

Ms. Melissa Marchand: Thank you.

Definitely the funding should be made available. Along with spreading the word in general, I think that would be the most critical and feasible approach going forward.

Mr. Eric Melillo: I appreciate that.

Thank you to all of you for being here. This is obviously an important discussion. Like my colleague from the NDP, I'm visiting this committee today. I don't regularly sit on it. I come from Kenora, also in northern Ontario, so I'm happy to see there's a northern Ontario contingent here today, but unfortunately, Kenora knows the issue of human trafficking all too well. It is part of the corridor between Thunder Bay and Winnipeg and it has really been getting a lot more attention in recent years. I think all of our community members have had their eyes opened to the issue that has been there for many years.

I would like to start with Mr. Flynn from the northern Ontario Angels. I'm curious to know a bit more about your organization. Does it operate solely within Sudbury, or are you doing work as well in other areas of northern Ontario, such as Kenora, for example?

Mr. Derrick Flynn: We're based in Sudbury, but we have clients all through the north. A lot of our work is done remotely by Zoom, of course, especially throughout COVID. We have support groups and peer support groups that we meet with on a weekly basis throughout the north. Throughout Ontario, we have a client base that we meet with. That's the majority. We do public education workshops as well throughout the north and in the indigenous community.

• (1615)

Mr. Eric Melillo: I appreciate that. Thank you.

I also noticed, just looking through your website and learning more about your organization, that there's certainly a component of indigenous culture within the counselling you provide. I think that's incredibly important. I don't have the statistics, unfortunately, for a number of the reasons that were mentioned earlier, but based on what we've been able to gather, we know that the overwhelming majority of women and girls who are trafficked in the Kenora region are indigenous. I'm wondering if you could speak to that.

I'd like to get others to comment as well on how important it is to have that cultural component when it comes to counselling. That's for whoever wants to jump in here.

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York: Absolutely. Cultural sensitivity and cultural supports for any culture of an individual who is leaving a trafficking situation or who is going through a trafficking situation are so integral. We are the only non-indigenous organization to sit on the restorative justice committee with one of our local bands in Sudbury. That allows us to have those elders and that different restorative justice approach in a human trafficking situation. That really flips things from the regular narrative we have, which is that victims and survivors are very separate from the perpetrators. It's definitely an indigenous perspective on healing and making that come full circle.

Just to speak to your connection with Kenora, I also sit on the northern alliance against human trafficking, and we have members in Kenora as well. We share our resources. We're sharing our school protocols and we're sharing our pathways so that if someone comes from, as Mr. Flynn said, a different jurisdiction, we're able to say that this is my friend in Kenora, these are the services and this is what we can offer in that place. Maybe there's a place of safety there, or maybe we're going to head down south and I'm going to connect with my resources there.

I think breaking down those silos is so very important. Whether it comes from an indigenous perspective, from a settler perspective or from an immigrant perspective, whatever that survivor and that victim needs, that's what we try to provide for them. Sometimes it's flying by the seat of your pants and going, "Okay—this is what this person needs. How can we make that happen?" We're very fortunate within our victim services portfolio to really be able to work with our victim quick response program and to bring those survivors and those victims what they need.

The Chair: Thanks so much, Tiffany.

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

Marc, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you to the four of you for being here today. Your testimony will help us with our recommendations.

Mr. Flynn, I'm really sorry for your loss. Thank you for your courage to explain about your daughter and the work that you're doing.

Obviously, Tiffany Pyoli York, thank you for the recommendations. You have provided us with seven recommendations here.

I want to ask this of both of you, to start off. We talked about 20 counselling sessions and one shelter bed. You talked about needs and the patchwork of services. What can we do as a federal committee here?

Mr. Flynn, you mentioned jurisdiction and being tired of hearing that aspect, but what can we do as a federal government, working more closely with the province, to look at the wraparound services the victim needs?

Mr. Derrick Flynn: First of all, just to be clear, I want to reiterate that the loss I spoke about was the daughter of one of our survivors.

We also are getting tired of the silos—trust me. The frontline workers are screaming at the top of their lungs. After this many years, we shouldn't have to anymore. We need to recognize what....

You know, play it out. A young girl is extracted by the police. They bring her to the police station at three o'clock in the morning. Now what? There are fewer than 20 beds between the GTA and here in Ottawa for specifically human trafficking survivors. As Tiffany mentioned, human trafficking survivors are unique in that they have suffered trauma that is unlike anything else. You can't put them in a typical shelter. It's dangerous to the shelter workers, it's dangerous to the other women and children who may be at that shelter, and it's dangerous for the survivor to be placed there. It's a failure every time. It's unconscionable that we have fewer than 20 beds from southern Ontario for human trafficking survivors. That's critical.

As I mentioned in my speech, typically it takes about seven attempts to exit. If they have nowhere to go, we give them a couple of nights in a hotel, a Tim Hortons card and a cellphone. Three or four nights down the road, they're back out on the street with survival sex. I guarantee you that within a week they're going to be trafficked again. It just becomes a never-ending cycle.

I hear from survivors all the time that they expect us to fail them, and we're doing a pretty good job of failing them. They're not really good at platitudes and shrugged shoulders; they want results. It's our responsibility to provide them with that.

• (1620)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

Go ahead, Tiffany.

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York: Thank you.

I can definitely echo the sentiments of Mr. Flynn that survivors are expecting us to fail. When those calls come in at three o'clock in the morning to the police station, or they bring a young person there.... A few months ago, that call was coming to me. Every call made by the greater Sudbury police and the OPP covering our jurisdiction in terms of human trafficking comes to me and my team. We're there at three o'clock in the morning and we're back in the office at eight o'clock in the morning.

I commend everyone who works in victim services in anti-human trafficking, because it's a hard job. We're faced with a survivor who says, "I need this. I need safety. I need a shelter bed where the people there understand that I will be waking up screaming in the middle of the night, remembering them branding me." They need a place where they won't be disturbing other people who have their own challenges and their own trauma.

As Mr. Flynn said, human trafficking is so unique. It's making a commodity of a human being. That trauma doesn't just end in one year, in 365 days.

Mr. Marc Serré: I have 20 seconds left.

Stats Canada will be coming to the committee to testify, and you talked a bit about data. Can you provide the committee in writing with some of the data that you need to collect in order to better understand some of the elements? When we meet with Stats Canada, we can follow up with them.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I think you almost have a timer with you there, Marc.

I'll now pass it over for two and a half minutes to Andréanne Larouche.

[*Translation*]

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

As I was saying at the end of my previous round, we talk a lot about prevention and help for victims, but we don't talk about how to detect and recognize cases of human trafficking.

Mr. Flynn, in your opening statement, you talked about the lack of resources, among other things. You also said that certain organizations obtain funding when they shouldn't have. I'd like to give you the opportunity to clarify your position on that point.

I also have a question for you: why are the numbers on human trafficking going up so much, in spite of measures taken in the 2019 action plan? Is it due to a lack of resources? You talked about a lack of communication and coordination between different departments and levels of government, for instance.

In short, I'd like you to confirm the information about organizations who should not have received funding and for you to answer my first question. I will ask the rest afterwards.

[*English*]

Mr. Derrick Flynn: That's a good question.

Human trafficking is an umbrella term, but supporting survivors of sex trafficking is not. It's very specific in the requirements. When we throw lots of money—funding—under that umbrella, it doesn't always trickle down to where it needs to go.

Education and awareness will always be a major part of the process in preventing sex trafficking and in serving survivors, but we need to make sure that under that umbrella the right amounts of resources are going to supporting the survivors in their recovery and helping them reintegrate back into society. That's what's lacking now.

There are people who are jumping on the bandwagon who are getting funding. It's not that their hearts are not in the right place and it's not that they are not worthy. However, in terms of priority, we need to prioritize the survivors and their recoveries.

• (1625)

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Marchand, you didn't get a chance to answer my questions. Would you like to add something

on the importance of prevention? Why, in spite of the action plan, is the number of human trafficking cases still so high?

[*English*]

Ms. Melissa Marchand: We're in agreement with what's been said by the agencies beside us as well. More funding needs to go directly to survivor support and the understanding of the nature of the survivor and the layers that are incorporated into the healing of that survivor. It goes beyond just—

The Chair: I'm sorry. I thought it was going to be a very short answer, but it wasn't.

I will pass the floor over to Lindsay. Lindsay, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

In terms of finding independence if someone can get through and out of that lifestyle, I heard from many people within that system that a lot of things await survivors once they are able to get out, and some of that is their being indebted. Their traffickers will take out huge loans in many different forms in their names. There's a bill in Ontario that is trying to adjust for that.

You're nodding like you know about it. Could you talk about the importance of passing that bill, and also where the federal government can ensure that we play a role as well?

Ms. Tiffany Pyoli York: I was fortunate enough to be able to sit in a conference with the major banks in Ontario talking about the FINTRAC proposal. I think that's something amazing that's going on in Ontario. That's great for me, because I'm from Ontario, but what about the rest of Canada?

As I said earlier, the problem of human trafficking isn't specific or unique to one province or one community. If we can have this at a national level, that would be helping Canadians, not pigeonholing the people from Ontario as being more important than people from the north, the west, the east.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I probably don't have enough time to ask....

Go ahead, Ms. Douglass.

Ms. Kathleen Douglass: One of the things we have not really talked about are the newcomers and the international students. Certainly in Peel and in the Brampton area, we have thousands of international students coming in. Quite often, because of the background they have when they come to Canada, they are not prepared for what they are going to see. They are very often the victims of trafficking from well-meaning aunts, people from their villages and people coming in.... Understanding that they have rights and do not have to be trafficked because they have to pay back loans and are obligated to provide for their families has to start right from when they are coming into this country.

I think we also need to look at international students as being a prime target for trafficking. That is a GTA-Peel region issue.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Well, in London we actually have a case of people coming from Ukraine who fell into that trap. It was really quite disturbing, so I appreciate that point.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you all—Derick, Tiffany, Kathleen and Melissa—for coming and providing your expertise on this issue.

We are about to suspend.

We're going to suspend very quickly, because we have everybody online. We just have to check the mikes.

We'll suspend for about one minute.

• (1625) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: Welcome back for our second panel. I would like to welcome everybody on our panel for the second half.

Today we have, from Statistics Canada, Kathy AuCoin, chief of analysis unit, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, and Lucie Léonard, director, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics. We also have Shelley Walker, chief executive officer, Women's Trucking Federation of Canada.

You may have heard that we had a bit of a connection issue with our fourth witness.

I'm going to pass it over to Statistics Canada now for the first five minutes. You have five minutes to share.

Ms. Lucie Léonard (Director, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Statistics Canada): Thank you very much, Madam Chair and honourable members of the standing committee. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present our most recent police-reported statistics on human trafficking in Canada.

Most of the information I will be focusing on today is part of the publications that we provided to the clerk for your reference.

It is important to note that the police-reported data that I will be drawing from reflects only those incidents of human trafficking that come to the attention of the police and that we know that many victims, as was mentioned today, are reluctant to report. Therefore, this data underestimates the true scope of human trafficking in Canada. However, we think it monitors this type of crime. This data is available and important to identify overall trends to highlight, again from a police-reported perspective, who is most at risk and where this crime occurs.

Between 2011 and 2021, there were over 3,500 incidents of human trafficking reported by police, involving 2,688 victims. From this data, we know that human trafficking is a form of gender-based violence, with the vast majority of victims being women and girls. Further to that, we also know that one-quarter of the victims are girls—that is, under the age of 18—while, of accused persons, eight in 10 are men and boys.

Nine in 10 victims of police-reported human trafficking knew their trafficker, and one-third of the victims were trafficked by an intimate partner. What we know as well is that the research has shown that traffickers often pose as potential romantic partners to recruit or lure individuals, with the end goal of trafficking them.

While men represented the large majority of adult accused persons, more than half of the youth accused were girls. Female youth, more and more, are perceived as being better positioned to appear trustworthy and thus are tasked with luring other girls. It is important to note that the boundaries between female trafficking victims and offenders are becoming increasingly blurred. Therefore, a high proportion of the female youth accused of trafficking were themselves victims of human trafficking.

From our police-reported data, we are not able to discern whether a human trafficking incident was related to sexual or labour exploitation or both. However, when we explored other related charges within the human trafficking incident, we found that in about 41% of the incidents involving a secondary offence, almost six in 10 were related to a sex trade offence, while one-quarter involved a sexual assault, again highlighting that most of these incidents reported to the police are related to sexual exploitation.

Between 2011 and 2021, the large majority of human trafficking incidents were reported to police in urban areas. More specifically, since 2011 more than four in 10 of these incidents were reported to police in four cities: Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax. Some of these were mentioned as part of this committee.

It is important to note that the differences between one Canadian city and another in terms of the number of victims reported are also likely impacted by regional differences, such as local human trafficking awareness campaigns, specialized training units that we see among police services, and available resources for detecting and reporting human trafficking.

In addition to that, we know that human trafficking is difficult to successfully prosecute. As a result of that, some police services, under the advice of the Crown, may recommend or lay other types of charges to move the cases through the justice system. Therefore, as a result of these charging practices, the overall count of human trafficking victims could be reduced.

Turning now to how these cases are handled in our criminal courts, we looked at some of the data from our integrated criminal court survey over an 11-year period, between 2010-11 and 2020-21, and found that there were around 950 cases involving just under 3,000 trafficking charges. Overall, the number of trafficking charges and cases increased over the period examined, similar to what was mentioned earlier.

According to adult criminal court records, human trafficking cases take longer to complete than do cases involving other violent offences. Specifically, human trafficking cases took a median number of 382 days to complete. This was more than twice as long as for sex trade-related cases and other violent-offence cases.

● (1640)

The data also found that fewer cases of human trafficking charges resulted in guilty decisions. Around one in eight human trafficking cases completed in adult criminal court over the period of the study resulted in a guilty decision for human trafficking charges. In comparison, a guilty decision was much more common for cases with a sex trade charge and cases with a violent offence charge. I'll leave it there.

Thank you, Madam Chair and honourable members of the committee, for your attention. I and my colleague Kathy AuCoin would be happy to answer some of the questions with regard to some of the issues that have been raised and also other work we're doing around increasing this information and, as also mentioned, around missing persons in Canada as well.

The Chair: That is fantastic. Thank you so much.

I'd now like to welcome Shelly Walker from the Women's Trucking Federation of Canada.

You have five minutes for your opening comments.

Ms. Shelley Walker (Chief Executive Officer, Women's Trucking Federation of Canada): Thank you.

My name is Shelly Walker. I'm the founder and chief executive officer of the Women's Trucking Federation of Canada. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

I've been involved with the transportation industry for over 30 years. I started my career as a school bus operator, and for the last 20-plus years I've been a professional driver.

I became aware of human trafficking several years ago and decided I needed to learn more. I reached out to Timea Nagy, an expert in this space, because I wanted to do more within the transportation industry. Through funding from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, we hired Timea's Cause to create an online survivor-led driver training course for professional drivers. We have also wrapped several 53-foot trailers with the "No Human Trafficking" message. We host a public launch with each trailer. We invite various levels of government, local police, victim services and local organizations to attend and give remarks about the services available in their areas.

We have also championed the Ontario Ministry of Transportation to include human trafficking awareness training in entry-level training. Hopefully, the federal Minister of Transport will also include this in the federal mandate. We would like to see online survivor-led training mandatory for every class of commercial licence. Whether you drive a cab, a school bus or a transportation van, everybody needs to have this training.

Every year at our annual conference, we bring in guests to speak about human trafficking. We want our attendees to learn more about what they can do to help, whether it is helping to spread

knowledge or to make financial contributions. Unfortunately, so many Canadians still believe it doesn't happen here in Canada. We believe a solution for this is probably custom-designed mobile educational trailers. With government funding and partnering with survivor-led organizations, we can make a difference. These trailers would have the ability to travel to remote locations to spread education and awareness. Skills Ontario and the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association both use these types of educational trailers and are having great success in their respective areas.

We all have a role to play in fighting to end human trafficking. By working together instead of against each other, we can all make a difference.

Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now begin our six-minute rounds of questioning. We'll start with Anna Roberts.

Anna, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you very much for appearing today and helping us to better understand how we can make a difference.

Ms. Walker, I understand that you've worked with Timea. We have heard from her. She's very insightful. She provided this committee with a lot of updated information that we need to know in terms of what we need to do.

First, are truckers trained on how to identify potential victims of human traffickers on the road?

Ms. Shelley Walker: No, they're not.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Would you agree that education and training them would help?

Ms. Shelley Walker: Yes, it would. I think it's very important that drivers learn.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I'm just wondering; it's a \$150-billion business. I hate to call it that, but I can't think of any other name. If we followed the money and stopped the money, it should stop the human trafficking. Do you agree?

Ms. Shelley Walker: You know, it might, but I think in reality they'll just find different ways to do it. If we look at the lifespan of criminals, whether they're drug dealers or the Mafia, they've found various ways to legalize their businesses. I think we need to do a lot more than we're currently doing.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: You've been a professional driver for 20 years. We keep hearing that the human trafficking numbers keep going up and up. The only way we can stop it is to stop the money flow. I really believe that, from speaking to different officers and different individuals.

Would you agree that if the government were to create a registration of all users and perpetrators and have that available for every single truck driver so that if they see these individuals with young girls, they might be more informed to call the police or maybe help them out?

Ms. Shelley Walker: Yes, I do. I think it would be really important.

If at some point we could create a mobile app that's easily accessible by truck drivers as well as victim service agencies, etc., I think it would make things a lot easier.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: In your opinion, if we were to seize the assets of all users, all perpetrators—every single asset—and take that money, put it back into the safe homes where we can provide the victims with the services they need to move on and to get away from this, would you think that would stop the flow of human trafficking?

Ms. Shelley Walker: Yes, I do.

Basically, right now the traffickers do not get enough jail time or any kind of monumental penalty. If we look at how we have done that in other areas, by seizing assets and returning that money, we see that it's a great way to go. It's something the government should have done a long time ago.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I also think that maybe we need to look at the fact that their sentences do not meet the crime. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Shelley Walker: Yes, I totally agree with that.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: In a sentence of two years, four years, with good behaviour, they're out in six months. We need to let people know that if you're going to commit a crime of human trafficking, you're going to be put in jail for a very long time.

I would ask, then, do you think that truckers across Canada should be mandated to take training in order to help us with that process—you told us that the truckers are probably our eyes and ears—as opposed to just leaving the responsibility to the police departments?

Ms. Shelley Walker: We travel the main corridors of Canada. The truck stops, the rest areas, are where a lot of this occurs. It's right where we are.

I hate to say it, but drivers commonly refer to these ladies we see wandering around the parking lots as “lot lizards”. They're somebody out there looking to make some money for the night, and they're willing to do anything to do it.

By having this type of training, we can let drivers know that not everyone knocking on their doors is a sex worker—that we have some very young girls who are being trafficked.

I can tell you, in the first year of the human trafficking awareness training that we put online, there were drivers who reached out to

us and said, “Oh, my God. I didn't know what I was seeing, but now I know.” We've had drivers who made some calls to 911. We've had drivers make calls down in the U.S.

Yes, I think driver training is important. That's why my organization and I have been very vocal on the need to make it mandatory training. We are very excited that we were able to get that in Ontario on the entry-level side with the truck training schools, so every newly licensed driver in the province of Ontario will have human trafficking awareness training.

I think that's really important.

• (1650)

Mrs. Anna Roberts: When we were doing our tour across Canada, we went to a few different airports and saw stickers on bathroom walls of women who had been trafficked. I think we should also—I'm going to ask your opinion on this—put the perpetrators and the users up there as well. What do you think of that?

Ms. Shelley Walker: That's a little out of my scope of expertise, but on a personal level, I am not opposed to that idea.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

I think we know what Anna is going to take care of. Thank you very much.

Emmanuella is online, and I'm going to pass it to her for six minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'd like to thank our witnesses for being with us today.

My first question is to Ms. Walker.

First of all, thank you for the initiative you've taken through your work to help women and girls in situations of human trafficking and violence.

I'm curious. I'm not sure that you mentioned it, but I want to have you repeat it if you did already. Is it very common for people in the trucking industry to witness this type of crime? If so, have you ever had any experiences or contacted women in this situation?

I'll let you start with that.

Ms. Shelley Walker: It's more common than we like. I can tell you as a driver that I have seen it. I have had them knock on my door. When it first started to occur to me, early on in my truck driving career, I was just thinking to myself, “Oh, Lord, not again. Stop knocking on my truck. I need to sleep. I have to get up in three hours and haul a load.” Quite often, as drivers, not knowing any better, we holler at them, “Go away. Get away from my truck.”

Once I took training, then it began to open up my eyes, and I realized what was going on. Then you try to look for signs and to pay attention to where they're going. I know to call 911 regardless of where I am and to try to get help. I can tell you that my experience, not with the Canadian human trafficking hotline but with the U.S. hotline, was being on hold for 30 minutes and still waiting for somebody to answer on the other end to the point where I finally, eventually, gave up.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

I know you mentioned that you worked with Timea as well, who has a lot of recommendations. I'm wondering, through your work in this area, if you could recommend anything for our government that could help women safely exit prostitution or sex work if they don't necessarily know that they've been trafficked, or in situations where they have been. Is there something that the government could do to make it easier for women to get the help that they need?

Ms. Shelley Walker: We could start off with making sure that they have housing, that they have someplace to go and that the proper supports are in place for them. I think we need to help them slowly get back into society. Most of them need counselling based on their culture and their beliefs. That's important.

I often hear from survivors. I do talk to quite a few of them. There are criminal records that follow them, and it really makes it hard for them to have a career. I can tell you that in conversations I've had with the Solicitor General's office in Ontario, the question I always ask them is, "They were a victim and went to jail. Are we now going to continue to victimize them for the rest of their lives by having that criminal record follow them?"

I really think something the federal government needs to look at is what we could do to change that and what we could do to give them the actual clean slate they deserve and don't currently get.

• (1655)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you. I appreciate your being here, your responses and the work that you do in this area.

Statistics Canada, I would like to ask you a question. I'm not sure if you have any stats with you about sentencing and about how long sentences are for people who have been accused, tried and found guilty of sex trafficking. Quite a few of our witnesses have talked about the fact that they're not long enough. I also know there's a range: The maximum sentence is a life sentence, and then there is a minimum sentence.

I'm wondering what if could tell me about that.

Ms. Kathy AuCoin (Chief of Analysis Unit, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Statistics Canada): That's a great question. I don't have those numbers right in front of me. However, what we know from the data is that a lot of the police-reported human trafficking incidents never even make it to court to start with. They are very complex and difficult to prosecute. Of those that make it, only very few get a finding of being guilty.

What we can do is find out what the sentencing outcomes are. However, from a bigger picture, very few make it to court and very few get a sentence of being guilty.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you. That's obviously a problem in itself.

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: It is, very much so.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: For the stats that you do have on that within your department, could you send those to the committee so that we have access to them?

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: Yes, I definitely will. Thank you.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I don't think there's much I can ask in 45 seconds to get a good enough response. I want to thank you guys.

I'll cede the rest of my time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to pass it over to Andréanne, who will probably say, "Let me take that time."

Andréanne, go ahead. You have two and a half minutes. It's a good thing.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us today to talk about this important issue.

Ultimately, we're realizing that we have few statistics available. Furthermore, we just heard that we sometimes get the impression of seeing just the tip of the iceberg, because people often find it difficult to file a report.

I'd also like to remind the committee that the witnesses we've welcomed over the last weeks, including federal department officials charged with fighting the trafficking of women and girls—we see that there's a lot—told us that we have very few numbers available on the current situation. That's what Ms. Leonard just told us as well.

The situation is worrisome. Many policies to end human trafficking were implemented as part of the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking 2019-2024. However, it's difficult to know if the strategy produced results, due to the lack of statistics, tools and processes for follow-up and assessments.

Ms. Léonard, I'd like to hear what you have to say on the difficulty of collecting data.

Ms. Lucie Léonard: As we said, as national statistical officers, we work mainly with police services to get data on human trafficking. We already talked about the lack of systems, standards and means of sharing information to ensure follow-up on those cases and retrace victims' locations.

We've already committed to getting some work done, particularly through telephone help services. However, what we want is to work for better standardization. It could be done by working with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and setting up mechanisms for better information gathering on people involved in human trafficking.

Along those lines, the committee is aware that creating a national database might be necessary. We're not especially interested in police investigation activities as such, but rather in standardization, which is more relevant to our role. We need to work with police services, which we're already doing.

For example, we participate in the work on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We play a role in the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking 2019-2024.

In 2021, we announced that we would work with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to create a database. It would improve standards and protocols, as well as police systems and information. All of it will help create a database that provides better information on the problem of human trafficking, while improving police investigations through better protocols and information systems.

That's the work we are committed to and want to continue on the issue of human trafficking.

Ms. AuCoin, did you want to add anything?

• (1700)

[English]

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: I would like to just add that the big concern is victims who never report to the police. Their first step is seeing a victim services agency. Those people are the first stop, the front line. From a victim-centred approach and a trauma-enhanced approach, they want to meet the needs of the victim, and that's not reporting to the police, so that's a data point we don't have.

We've worked with victim services in the past. They are underfunded. They would love to collect data, but they don't have those resources.

If you want to really have a full understanding of the magnitude and the number of victims of human trafficking, it's with the front-line workers in victim services. However, their money is always going to finding shelter and supporting the needs of the victims. They are not data collectors.

There's always that balancing act that we have to consider.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: That's interesting, because you mentioned Indigenous women and girls. I remind everyone that tomorrow is May 5, which marks Red Dress Day. It's a day when we can collectively reflect on the reasons why, in 2023, Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately affected by the various things we about at committee. That includes resource exploitation, sexual exploitation or domestic violence. So, tomorrow, let's take the time to reflect on it all.

Another thing I find worrisome is the issue of trust in the system. Victims should not be afraid of reprisals or being victimized again. They should be able to believe that they really will be helped. As you said, from 2011 to 2021, 54% of human trafficking cases reported to police weren't solved, meaning the police didn't identify an alleged perpetrator. In comparison, just over one third, or 35%, of cases of general violence weren't solved. That means there are many more unsolved cases when it comes to human trafficking.

How do we explain the difference? Why is it so difficult to identify perpetrators of these crimes? What should we implement to better identify them?

[English]

The Chair: We're right at the six-minute point. I'm going to add a little bit of extra time to the next round for Andréanne, so we'll pick up some of that time.

I'm now going to pass it over to Lindsay. Lindsay, you have six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you again to the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Walker, I'm very excited. I'll see you actually in person, I think, next week. I represent London—Fanshawe. Your organization, the Women's Trucking Federation, is coming to London.

I am hoping you can maybe talk about the hubs. We've been discussing the hubs and the increase we've seen in terms of the stats coming out of Ontario. Madam Chair, you will well know that London itself is becoming a hub in terms of that Highway 401 corridor.

I am hoping, Ms. Walker, you can talk specifically about that and about what you're seeing in terms of those trends along that corridor.

Ms. Shelley Walker: We are seeing an uptick in the actual truck stops themselves. When we talk with different victim service agencies as well as local police, they are telling us that the increase in human trafficking in the London area is quite high.

We reached out to one of our corporate members. We asked him about wrapping a 53-foot trailer that will spread the human trafficking message. On the side of the trailer there is an image. It has the 1-800 number for the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking. It also has a link to the No Human Trafficking website. That is currently being updated all the time with new resources and services for survivors.

• (1705)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

I'm very happy to see you all. I know that Ms. Tallon Franklin was supposed to be here with us today. She and her organization, Courage for Freedom, have started really focusing on a lot of those ONroutes, those service centres along Highway 401, in terms of trying to educate the workers at those centres and of course the people who are travelling who are using ONroutes. Certainly your organization, the people who are in your group, use those quite a lot.

Could you talk about whether you are working together with those organizations? What are you seeing coming out of the efforts? Are you joining efforts on that front?

Ms. Shelley Walker: We are working with a lot of different agencies. Unfortunately, I don't do a lot of stuff with Kelly. We've had a couple of conversations, but we don't always seem to hook up at the right time.

I think we all have been targeting ONroute centres in terms of doing more in the human trafficking sphere, but in one conversation we had, we were told, “Oh, we can't put anything up in here about that; it will scare our customers away.”

That's an issue—making businesses aware that they do have responsibility to everyone. That includes every person who comes in to their space. I think if we monitor the type of signage or posters that are put up or the videos that are up there so that we don't do anything that's going to be traumatic to anyone or set up a trauma trigger, we can do a lot more in those areas. It's kind of like #NotInMyCity now at the airports and the signage that is up. I think more public spaces that have the traffic flow coming in and out of them should be doing something.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of supports from government in relation to some of these programs that you both run yourselves and that you've seen being effective, where are the major holes you see, both provincially and federally, as we're discussing what the federal government can do today?

Ms. Shelley Walker: Everything boils down to funding. That's what I'd like to say.

I talk to a lot of different organizations, whether they're in the trucking industry or are the human trafficking groups, and I'm constantly hearing the same thing: that the funding is never enough. Either they run out of funding or it seems that the same organizations are constantly getting funding while the other ones, those that have so much knowledge and experience, are totally getting left out in the cold. Take Timea Nagy, for instance, who in all of her years of being in operation has never once received government funding.

If you've ever sat down and looked at what the government asks of somebody, of an organization, to fill out on a government proposal just to apply for funding, it's mind-boggling. It really is. I think we need to do something to cut the red tape, change how the grant systems and funding programs are run and bring it down to a little more...I like to say “bring it back to reality”.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Certainly when I was last on this committee, there were a lot of conversations about the difference between funding for programs and then core operational funding, the long-term funding that allows these organizations to service not just one specific program with a specific target. Then they have the opportunity to look into the long term and plan many years into the future.

That would go for women's shelters and programs that are working against violence against women. Would you agree with that overall?

Ms. Shelley Walker: Yes, I really think that needs to be done. I think it needs to be broken up a little.

I can tell you that we fund everything we do in the human trafficking sphere ourselves. The very first trailer that was wrapped and put on the road I paid for out of my own pocket, because I believed that the trailer would make a difference.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'm now going to start our second round of five minutes, five minutes, two and a half minutes and two and a half minutes with Anna Roberts.

Anna, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to go back to something you said earlier, Ms. Walker.

In reading Timea's book, one of the things I was quite surprised by is that she has helped over 300 victims. In the book, she mentions working with the Peel police, who we were very fortunate to visit during our time on our tour. It's a very successful program. She says in her book—and this might be something that we need to use for our truckers—that she always carries what she calls a “safe bag”; I think that's how she refers to it, but don't quote me on it.

When she meets with these victims, she doesn't start asking questions right away because of the fact that she was a victim herself. She brings a care package so that the victims are not revictimized. She'll bring them hand cream. She'll bring them a toothbrush. She'll bring them.... These are essentials for them to use and that they may not have had for a while. In sharing some of her experiences, she is building their confidence.

Would you say with regard to the training for truckers that this would be helpful for them to understand?

● (1710)

Ms. Shelley Walker: I think some of that training will, but you have to understand that we don't have a lot of room to carry a safe bag, and if I am a driver who crosses borders, some things are restricted on the U.S. side, so we have to really look at everything.

I think more education and awareness are what's needed in the trucking industry to help improve things. It will make a difference.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: If we are going to train the truckers to identify individuals who are trafficked, what is it that they do when they identify someone? Do they call the police? How do they deal with it?

Ms. Shelley Walker: I can tell you that Timea Nagy is the one who designed our online training course for professional drivers. One of the main things she stresses is that if they see somebody in imminent danger, they're to call 911, and after that, it's The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you for that.

I am going to ask a question of Kathy from Stats Canada.

The statement you made was that in 2019 the feds put out an action plan, but it is difficult to collect the information.

How can we, as a team, make recommendations if we don't hear what the victims have explained once they are arrested? We could learn, ourselves, in order to put recommendations into the report. How can we get that information?

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: That's a great question.

The data that we use comes from police-reported information management systems. If I look at the trend data from 2011 to 2017, there were year-over-year increases in the number of police-reported incidents. In 2018-9, there were really high numbers, and in 2020-21, it kind of flatlined.

To get the narrative, the story, the experiences from survivors would have been a qualitative study. There is some very good qualitative research in which there were one-on-one interviews with survivors of human trafficking. From a statistical perspective, though, what we always have to grapple with, and what we are asked often, is the overall prevalence. How big is that problem?

When we have victims who are scared for their lives, who are concerned about their families, their friends, and scared about being abused if they go to the police, capturing the data from the police will always be just the tip of the iceberg. Any agency or victim service that is capturing information could help us understand the bigger picture.

However, as Ms. Walker said, funding for victim services is all over the map. Do they have the resources and the staffing to collect information? Then, from a comparability perspective, with so many frontline services available, how do you harvest all of that information to give us the big picture?

From Statistics Canada's perspective, we rely on the police-reported data. We get data from some shelters. We're working now with the Canadian hotline to look at their data so we can make a nicer picture to explain what we think is going on.

• (1715)

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Can you get that data to us? Is that possible?

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: I can send you the information about the shelters.

The Chair: Yes. We'll make a list for you, Kathy, because I'm sure there will be a few things we want to get on there.

I am going to pass it over to Anita now for five minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you so much to our witnesses.

I'd like to first ask questions of StatsCan and pick up on some of the previous questions about how you get your data and where you find it.

We've been talking about how we find the numbers, the data, but what about the disaggregated data? For instance, among the x number of women and girls we know are trafficked, how many of them are newcomers? What are the ages? What are their backgrounds? I am wondering whether there is there an ability to get that kind of data.

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: That's a critical question.

What we can release at the moment are age and sex. We are unable to release ethnicity, which is a huge gap. However, currently Statistics Canada, working in association with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, will start collecting ethnicity data.

That will fill a key gap. I'm thinking about across borders and whether there are indigenous women. We'll be able to capture that information moving forward.

We don't have immigrant status, but we have the ability to link our police-reported data to other datasets within Statistics Canada. We're hopeful that in the coming years, we'll be able to get a sense of whether someone is a new immigrant or what their status is. That's something we will be working on.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Much of what we heard in our study is that indigenous women and girls are overrepresented and that foreign students are being recruited. I think it would be quite key to be able to get that information.

Related to that, you just mentioned that the police are providing you with some of this data. How well are you able to gather data from provinces, from police services? What are your sources? Are there any areas where you're having difficulty getting data that might have been collected?

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: Through our Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, we extract information from more than 600 police services across Canada. We get the data in a consistent manner. It's high quality.

The challenge we currently have is that anecdotally we know that some police services are taking a trauma-informed approach in dealing with human trafficking victims and may not categorize an incident as human trafficking because the victim doesn't want to press charges and the police are following their lead. Also, they might be informed by the Crown that they need to lay a charge of something else in order to get this case moving through the system. There are some instances of this happening, and therefore we are currently having additional conversations with some police services to say, "Could we be coding it some way? How can we capture some of the information you are gathering? We know you're doing good work with some victims, but we're not getting all of that information."

Some of those conversations are ongoing, and if there are opportunities to exploit data from these agencies, we will try to resolve this.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I imagine that confidentiality and privacy are probably real concerns there.

We've heard the same thing, that very often the police will charge based on the drugs they find there or on other offences, and not necessarily on the trafficking offence. Also, one of the things we've heard is that there is so much more to trafficking than the criminality. It's a continuum, and so coercion and things like that wouldn't necessarily meet that criminal threshold.

Is there a way to collect any of that kind of data?

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: Again we have to understand that police officers are trying to gain the trust of victims and that their priority is to safeguard that victim. They have to gain that trust, so if the victim is reluctant to share information about the perpetrator and is feeling threatened, then the priority is to find housing. As Mr. Flynn, a previous witness, said, it might be a week or a month later or the individual may never press a charge. They just want to find a safe place.

• (1720)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: We've heard a lot about online grooming. Is there any way to collect data on what is happening online where these young girls are being groomed, are being exploited?

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: Currently within our systems we do have a flag that will indicate whether a computer was used in the perpetration of this violent offence. We haven't yet looked at it in terms of human trafficking.

My concern would be that maybe the luring part would start, but once the individual or the young child was being trafficked, then the contact would have been made. It's something we're going to explore.

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

We're now going to pass it back over to Andréanne Larouche.

Andréanne, go ahead.

[Translation]

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

Ms. AuCoin and Ms. Léonard, thank you for being here today.

Ms. Léonard, I'd like to give you an opportunity to finish what you were saying at the end of my first round. I'll ask you to do it in less than a minute, if possible, because I'd like to talk with the other witnesses well.

What could we implement? With the numbers you have, could you make one or two recommendations to better identify human trafficking cases? As we said, there's a difference between reported cases, depending on whether it's human trafficking or other cases of violence in general.

Ms. Lucie Léonard: As we said, we have to work with all police services and get an official commitment to create a national database. That would lead to establishing comparable standards, processes and information systems. We need to set up a mechanism to facilitate information sharing between different jurisdictions impacted throughout the country. It would allow us to create standards for conducting investigations. We talked about missing persons. It would also ensure that these cases are in fact reported and investigated more closely.

That's what we observed in cases of sexual assault deemed unfounded. By working with police services and organizations that offer services to victims, we reduced the number of sexual assault cases deemed unfounded. The same approach could apply to these cases. If we work with police services and offer better training, we can better understand the situation and deal with it.

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

Ms. Walker, I participated in a two-day retreat on human trafficking at the Museum for Human Rights, in Winnipeg. Your organization was onsite as an event partner, and I must say it was extraordinary. I was delighted to hear that.

What were your takeaways from those two days? What discussions did you have? What suggestions or proposals stayed with you?

[English]

Ms. Shelley Walker: I was very shocked that it was the same type of conference with the same big corporations discussing the same things that we all know about. I would like to have seen some more workshops or working groups to actually come up with solutions.

I'm a big believer, and I would rather sit there and listen to a survivor than to somebody from a large corporation who is only there to better themselves. I walked away a little disappointed in that event. I was hoping that there would have been more discussion than what there was.

The Chair: Thanks so much, Shelley.

I'm now going to pass it over to Lindsay. Lindsay, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I'd like to ask this of the StatsCan witnesses. I've been trying to put something forward, and in our provincial government there's a bill, Bill 99, that they're trying to get through the legislature. Ultimately this would help survivors who are trying to rebuild their lives to get out from under debt that has been collected by human traffickers from those witnesses.

I was wondering if you collect any data or have any information, because we're looking at a way to do this federally as well and to have some legislation federally. One of the groups that's been working on this, Project Recover, says that the federal and provincial governments also get a cut of the debt incurred by human traffickers because of their collection of HST.

Do you have any information on that, or do you collect any information around that debt incurrence and what happens to it?

• (1725)

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: Statistics Canada does have data on HST that's collected from legal businesses, but even if we knew the entities and their nefarious criminal activities, we would have no way of being able to determine that. When we collect data for HST that's paid or not, it gets aggregated into large data points that are released at the provincial level, rather than on individual entities. That information is not collected through our justice data.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I am looking at data, and it says about \$14,000 per year at least. How would that data have been collected if StatsCan isn't looking at it? Is it not officially collected?

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: It's FINTRAC.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Okay.

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: I suspect FINTRAC is collecting it, because they are focusing their investigative efforts on people who are doing criminal activity. They are following financial transactions and are able to calculate it. I believe that's where you're getting those data points from.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: The federal government would have to look at those services. Could it rely upon those FINTRAC services in order to get the data and to better inform the legislation that it would need to put forward?

Ms. Kathy AuCoin: I couldn't comment.

I know that FINTRAC has done some great work in tracking human trafficking people and how they spend their money. They have followed their transactions and have come up with some great studies, but I couldn't get into the details.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: That's fair enough.

Perhaps I could recommend that if they're not already a part of the list of witnesses, maybe some of that information could be submitted to the committee.

The Chair: That's such a good idea. This is the way we work in London. We just look at it and say, "Okay, we've got it. All right."

On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank the witnesses for coming forward and providing this important information.

I have just a couple of notes for our committee members.

I'm going to remind everybody that for the study we'll be starting on mental equity, we've pushed the request for witnesses back to May 12, so could everybody have the names of their witnesses, and their contact information, by noon next Friday?

Second, the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth has accepted our invitation, and we'll be studying the main estimates on Thursday, May 18, for the first hour.

Seeing there are no more questions or comments, it looks like it's time to go.

Today's meeting is adjourned.

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