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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the 125th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. This meeting is being held in public. Today we'll continue our study on the system of shelters and transition homes serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence.

For this, I am pleased to welcome Josie Nepinak, executive director of the Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society; you will find her on video conference. Then, from Quebec Native Women Incorporated, we have Viviane Michel, who is the president.

I'm going to turn it over to Ms. Nepinak for the next seven minutes. You'll see me start waving when your time is getting close.

You have the floor.

Ms. Josie Nepinak (Executive Director, Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society): Thank you for your introduction. I'm Josie Nepinak.

Greetings, first of all, from Calgary. Calgary is situated, as you probably know, in Treaty No. 7 first nations. We have beautiful weather today.

I'm here to talk about Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society. We were established in 1992 to provide holistic support and guidance to women and children who were fleeing violence. *Awo Taan* in the Blackfoot language means shield, protector. Its name represents the approach for culturally appropriate and safe protection and support against family violence.

Our vision is to provide services to families living in peace and our mission is to provide a continuum of support services to anyone affected by family violence and abuse.

I'd like to tell you, first of all, that in Alberta there are 46 emergency shelters. According to statistics, up to 60% of the women and children coming into shelters in Alberta are indigenous. Therefore, to guide our work, we have developed some guiding principles, and I'd like to tell you a bit about them. We value the traditional knowledge of the elders and the transfer of knowledge as sacred. We acknowledge and value the spirit and integrity of all individuals affected by violence.

We believe that healing requires a multi-faceted response, including intervention, provision of safe shelters, spiritual and cultural services, community-based services, and information to victims and to those who batter, as well as public education and the enforcement of appropriate laws. We also believe that violence is manifested through intergenerational trauma and that healing of that trauma is influenced through community-based education.

We are governed by a volunteer board of directors, who provide collective direction and oversight for our activities. I lead a multidisciplinary team that provides a range of services and programs to indigenous women and their families based upon strength-based trauma care and violence-informed care that foster indigenous healing, pride, self-esteem and cultural identity.

Our aboriginal framework for healing and wellness is our working document and our service delivery model, which provides tools for healing and wellness, and responsive and culturally appropriate strategies. It provides a range of culturally sensitive services to indigenous people and their families.

We have been in service for 25 years, and over those years we have developed our care program and our healing and wellness program with an emphasis on violence-informed care. We also continue to evaluate our framework to test our relevance and the impact of the work that we do around the trauma-informed, culturally responsive services.

For the past 25 years, we have built programming and services and developed strategies for indigenous people, and the people themselves—our mothers and children, people in the community, our partners—have identified indigenous models as most useful in our understanding and knowledge of what constitutes culturally appropriate service delivery.

Therefore, we have expanded from providing crisis services to providing a range of culturally sensitive programs to address the immediate and long-term needs of families affected by violence. We have a number of programs, and I'll just mention a few. We have the emergency shelter program and our family violence prevention program. We have a rural outreach and community program. We have an aboriginal support program, and youth mentorship. All these programs, with the exception of the emergency women's shelter, are inclusive of men and extended to family members impacted by violence so they can be part of the family healing process.

We prefer to call our shelter a lodge primarily because we know, with trauma-informed care, that women coming into the shelter have already had multiple experiences with trauma, whether at residential school or during the sixties scoop, and have suffered loss of language, culture and ceremony. The lodge represents more of the healing process.

• (1535)

We have 32 beds and we offer a full-service emergency shelter. We operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and we provide services to all women fleeing violence. Those services include emergency crisis support, emergency accommodation, cultural supports, mentorship, intensive case management, community healing and education.

We have an innovative child care program and a reconciliation and healing from trauma program, which is fairly new for us. The reconciliation and healing program uses an enhanced approach to counselling and providing supports for women who stay at the lodge. We have an indigenous psychologist who is trauma-informed, so we practise culturally safe trauma- and violence-informed counselling and support healing of all forms of violence and abuse.

The lodge is core-funded by the Province of Alberta, under the homeless supports division.

We recently completed the “Comprehensive Report: Building a Case to Explore the Impact of Indigenous Trauma-Informed Care and Other Promising Practices at the Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society”. The scope of the work included the development of a program logic model and a review of internal documentation for relevance, achievement and outcomes, as well as our design, delivery and efficiency. We also did an external literature review of culturally relevant frameworks, models, principles and strategies for family violence prevention at women's emergency crisis shelters, primarily serving indigenous women.

The Chair: What we're going to do, since we're past our seven minutes now—

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Oh, I'm—

The Chair: It's all good.

There will be an opportunity to add more when we have questions.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass the floor over to Viviane Michel.

You have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Viviane Michel (President, Quebec Native Women Inc.):
[*Witness speaks in an indigenous language*]

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the Creator for bringing me here safe and sound, as well as the Anishinabek nation for hosting us on its vast territory.

My name is Viviane Michel, and I am the president of Québec Native Women.

Québec Native Women represents 10 nations in Quebec, including the urban population. Our organization has Réseau des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes autochtones, a network of 13 shelters for indigenous women. Two more are coming soon for the Naskapi and Eeyou populations, which will bring their total to three shelters.

I would also like to thank the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for including Québec Native Women in this process.

[*English*]

The Chair: Viviane, could you slow it down just a tad, so that the interpreters can do it?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: All right. As I'm sure you can appreciate, seven minutes isn't much, but I'm used to talking fast.

I'm going to comment on the two issues the committee asked us to address, beginning with current federal programs and funding in support of shelters and transition houses.

In 1990, we set up a shelter funded by the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs. The department gave us \$143,000 to establish the regional shelter, serving nine Innu communities. That isn't a lot of money. It had to cover not just the cost of running the shelter, but also the salaries of four workers, a coordinator and a director. It covered the bare minimum. In comparison, the city had its own shelter for women who were victims of violence, and it received \$450,000 from the province. The gap between federal and provincial funding was very wide, indeed.

Current shelter funding isn't consistent. Shelters in communities are funded by the federal government. In urban areas, however, shelters are funded by the province because they are outside a community. In some cases, band councils administer the funding for indigenous shelters, and that can be problematic. Consider one case where a woman reported being sexually assaulted by a band chief, and the band council would not let the indigenous shelter assist her. Politics can sometimes cause problems, affecting how shelters are managed. For that reason, funding should be standardized and administered by indigenous shelters directly.

Staff working at shelters for indigenous women need ongoing training. They put their heart and soul into their work, having to deal with numerous and varied cases. These include victims reporting sexual assault or contemplating suicide. These workers need access to training opportunities so that they have the skills and tools they need to provide the best possible support in all circumstances.

Funding has to include workers' salaries. In communities, the salaries vary significantly from one indigenous shelter to another and are not commensurate with the work being done. These factors contribute to the high turnover among indigenous shelter workers, many of whom quit or go on sick leave. Better-trained employees with access to better tools are desperately needed. In order to provide culturally sensitive support, they must be trained by, for and with indigenous people.

The second issue was the number of available beds. The bed shortage is especially problematic in Montreal and Quebec City, which serve a larger clientele. Conversely, communities can have the opposite problem. In places like Schefferville, beds sit empty because everyone knows everyone in the small community, so it's incredibly difficult to protect a person's confidentiality.

That brings me to my recommendations.

My seven minutes are already up?

• (1540)

[English]

The Chair: You have two minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Could you repeat that more slowly, please?

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Our first recommendation is to provide core funding to Réseau des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes autochtones, our network of shelters for indigenous women. This would allow for training and information sharing among indigenous shelters, on a par with the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale and the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes au Québec.

Our second recommendation is to expand shelter services to better reflect the needs, realities, culture and traditions of indigenous women experiencing domestic violence and spousal abuse.

Our third recommendation is to establish services for men who are violent or experiencing violence themselves. They need to be part of the healing process for indigenous nations.

Our fourth recommendation is to give communities additional human resources to address domestic violence and spousal abuse.

Our fifth recommendation is to develop interorganizational memoranda of understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous shelters and such partners as police, social service agencies, the youth protection branch and other relevant authorities.

Our sixth recommendation is to educate indigenous women on the legal system as it relates to domestic violence and spousal abuse, including legal guidance and assistance with complaints.

Our seventh recommendation is to make a range of tailored services available to indigenous women experiencing domestic violence and spousal abuse and thus ensure they have a safety net.

Our eighth recommendation is to allocate more financial resources to indigenous police forces for the purposes of training and female officer recruitment.

Our ninth recommendation is to allocate resources to specifically support the families of missing and murdered indigenous women.

Our 10th and final recommendation is to launch an awareness campaign to educate and support female seniors who experience violence in all forms.

There you have it. I don't think I've gone over my allotted time.

• (1545)

[English]

The Chair: You are fantastic.

[Translation]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: It's 7:02, right on the dot, and that's with asking about those two minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We are now going to a round of questioning.

We'll be starting a seven-minute round with Pam Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thanks to both of our witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Nepinak, I notice that in addition to the work you've done with the shelter, you've also worked with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, as well as on the expert advisory panel on the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability.

My question has to do with the prevalence of firearms in domestic violence. In speaking with shelters, I've heard quite often about the use of firearms, not only in assaults on women, but being used to threaten women, their children and companion pets to force women to stay in a relationship. I'm wondering if you could comment on that.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: That certainly is the case.

Last week, the Canadian domestic observatory released a document stating that indigenous women are killed primarily by stabbings, and that guns are used primarily for killing women in more rural communities, such as farming communities, etc.

I would agree that using guns to threaten families to stay in a situation is very probable.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I wonder if you both could comment on... You're working in urban settings, and a number of indigenous women are coming into urban settings. You both touched on this. The challenges they're facing are different on reserve versus in the city.

How can the federal government assist women in urban settings in particular to be able to find shelters? Is there anything we should be doing differently?

Maybe I'll start with Viviane, and then we'll go over to you, Josie.

[Translation]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Having been a shelter worker, I can tell you that, in communities, where everyone knows everyone, one of the biggest issues is confidentiality. An abused women who wants to report her attacker has to have the wherewithal to face family, friends and members of the community. In fact, it's not uncommon for the person with whom the victim has to file a complaint to be the abuser's brother. This is a big concern in communities, so it's no wonder that women who are victims of violence tend not to report their abusers. In urban areas, however, ensuring confidentiality isn't as difficult because the area is larger and the location of the shelter isn't a matter of public knowledge. That difference has to be taken into account.

Within communities, a lot of effort is necessary to ensure shelters are secure. The Tipinuaikan shelter, in Sept-Îles, for instance, is located in the community, so some of the men know it's a shelter for women who are victims of violence. The whole dimension of shelter safety and security, including police involvement, has to be addressed by multi-stakeholder groups. The financial aspect is another challenge. Who is going to assume the lion's share of shelter security costs? As everyone knows, shelters are barely able to get by.

• (1550)

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do you want to add anything to that, Josie?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Yes. Quite often the needs are very different. For women coming into the Awo Taan shelter from northern and remote communities, there is often the loss of culture, identity, isolation and cultural supports.

Quite often, the funding does not provide adequate resources to be able to continue to provide those much-needed healing supports in the city shelters. For example, if the use of elders and the use of language, culture and ceremony are not available in the shelter, that can impede her holistic wellness and whether or not she goes back to that violent situation. We often don't have the funds and the supports to be able to develop that strategy.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have only a little over a minute left, so I would interrupt you there, if I could.

When we were doing a study on indigenous women in the justice system, we talked a lot about healing lodges. We heard that, often, when women are coming into a healing lodge, it's actually their first exposure to indigenous culture. They need to learn. They need to be exposed to culture. I'm wondering if you encounter that in the shelters as well.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: We encounter that very much so in the shelters. I think the reason is that others have never offered it before. Awo Taan in Calgary is the first one that I'm aware of, at least in the province, that provides culturally responsive services. Yet, 60% of the women coming in are indigenous.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Viviane, do you offer indigenous culture within the shelters?

[Translation]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Services vary depending on the shelter. Some provide more culture-based services such as having a tent out back. Our network of shelters for indigenous women has an added

benefit: shelter workers speak the language spoken in the community, such as Innu or Naskapi. Consequently, victims of violence don't face a language barrier at the shelter.

[English]

The Chair: Excellent.

Thank you very much.

We're now going to move on to Rachael Harder for seven minutes.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Starting with you, Ms. Nepinak, I'm just wondering if you can talk to me a little about what happens when the three weeks are up. It's my understanding that the women who come and stay in the shelter can be there only for three weeks, and then from there, something happens. When the three weeks have passed, what happens to those women? Where do they end up going?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: I often believe that in three weeks we expect miracles to happen, which is not fair to the women and children who come in. Typically with indigenous families, the woman is in her mid-twenties. She usually has three children.

We require her to find housing, within the 21 days, and income support. If there are issues around child welfare or emergency protection orders, or just keeping her life intact in those three weeks.... Living in a communal type of facility, such as a shelter that has rules, is very difficult at times.

She could ask us for an extension. She may not have found housing. She may be waiting on an appointment with homeless supports or supports for income. We provide extensions, and we have provided extensions many times, which means there are fewer and fewer women coming into the shelter, because there are delays in other areas. Not all the systems work the way that we want them to, at times. We will keep her until she finds a place to go, has money for rent and that kind of thing.

• (1555)

Ms. Rachael Harder: What is the average stay of a woman in your shelter?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: It's about 30 days. At times, we have had up to three months.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Those who move out after 30 days, or three months—it really doesn't matter—where do they go?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: They go into public housing. Some go into second-stage housing, and we provide outreach and support to those women. Some go back to their home communities. It might be in a neighbouring Calgary community, such as Siksika Nation or Tsuut'ina Nation, or Stoney Nakoda. It depends on where they go. Some go back to the northern communities. There's a lot of loneliness and isolation.

Ms. Rachael Harder: To what extent do these women return to their original home situation?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: According to some of the research I recall from a couple of years ago, up to 45% of the women go back to their home situation. There are a number of reasons for that.

One is the lack of safe and affordable housing in Calgary, and the other one is the social networks they have in their community. That could be around language or just being with family and having that safety net. Although there continue to be variables around... The home may not be safe, but is it better to be with family, and to find that security within family, than to find yourself in a dingy little basement apartment, isolated, in Calgary?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Would you say, then, that there is a need for greater housing supports right across the continuum?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Absolutely. Second-stage housing, more wraparound services for women who are integrating back into the community if, let's say, they stay in Calgary....

If they should go back to their communities, what are the supports they need? There isn't a good communication process around that. If she's here in Calgary and goes back to Saddle Lake, for example, what does she need when she goes back? We don't have those mechanisms in place. We don't have the capacity to be able to do that follow-up when she leaves us.

Ms. Rachael Harder: These women are coming out of dangerous situations. They've been mistreated. I'm sure there are often legal matters at hand, and perhaps charges that they would like to press. What types of supports are available for these women, should they wish to pursue that?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: At Awo Taan, there aren't a lot of supports. We do not have court support workers on our staff, because we don't have the resources to do that.

Sometimes it's a hit-and-miss. Sometimes we will ask someone from another program to accompany her to the courthouse and explain the process to her. We don't have a dedicated.... Sometimes we miss on developing that program, where inconsistencies start to pop up and we're not doing her a great service.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Viviane, do you have anything you wish to add? Perhaps you could reflect on where women tend to go after they stay in the shelter for a period of time.

It was stated that 45% of the women are going back to their original situation. Would you say that you have that same observation within your centre?

[Translation]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: When women come to the shelter, they are very vulnerable. They have suffered a loss of control, so when they come to us, we give them time to catch their breath. They are

exhausted, emotionally and psychologically. Later, when they meet with shelter workers, a care plan is developed.

The length of the stay varies from one shelter to another. Some shelters can accommodate women for up to six months, provided that they stick to their care plan, which can include one-on-one meetings, legal steps or sessions with experts. Shelter workers aren't psychologists, so a psychologist may also be brought into the process. Social workers may be involved as well, since shelter referrals can come from them. All of those efforts continue during the client's stay at the shelter.

Most of the time, the women do, indeed, go back home. You have to understand, though, that they love their husbands, just not their violent behaviour. What's more, victims of violence are gripped with fear, always worried about leaving forever. They become fearful and highly dependent on the abuser.

• (1600)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Viviane.

We're now going to move over to Sheila Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both of the witnesses for their work.

Can you both give me a snapshot of the gap between the demand for the safety services that you offer and your ability to provide them? How many women who ask for help are being turned away?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: I can answer that question first.

On average, each year, we field approximately 2,500 crisis calls. We provided shelter to 250 women and 275 children last year. Our turn-aways are about 1,200 women and children per year.

Where do these women go? We do referrals to other shelters in the city of Calgary. There are two other emergency shelters.

What we're finding is that some indigenous women are not comfortable with going to mainstream shelters. Here's the reason why: Often there's a lack of understanding. That's primarily around cultural understanding. There may be no brown faces in the shelter. There may be no one who speaks their language or has a common history or experience. There may be someone who just doesn't get it. It's impacted by racism. The woman is not necessarily comfortable.

Therefore, we have found that women will actually wait until they can come into our indigenous shelter, which puts them in a further vulnerable situation.

Thank you.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

Viviane, how many are turned away?

[Translation]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: The demand for our services is twofold. On the one hand, we have women looking for shelter services, and on the other hand, we have those who just want someone to listen, a service we can also provide by phone. Sometimes, they are former residents of the shelter who just need someone to talk to. We provide those two kinds of services, then.

We don't turn anyone looking for help away. When women call us, we assist them and they go through the process. The call for help really has to come from the victim, herself. It can't be someone calling for her. If the shelter is full, we refer the victim to a non-indigenous shelter in the area. Finding one usually isn't a problem.

[English]

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

Just two years ago now, in November 2016, we had the United Nations committee to end discrimination against women. One of its observations was that the committee "remains concerned about the lack of a coherent plan or strategy to improve the socioeconomic conditions of indigenous communities, in particular indigenous women to combat the root cause of their vulnerability to violence".

In her report on Canada in April of this year, the United Nations special rapporteur to end violence against women observed that there should be an action plan that "should be indigenous led and supported by adequate resources, in particular ensuring the provision of a sufficient number of housing units, transitional houses and shelters, especially needed by Indigenous communities, that should be run by them and used [as a hub] for other services needed for recovery and empowerment, in line with the human rights based approach." A national action plan "should also address specific challenges and provide more services for indigenous women in remote areas where victims face difficulties in accessing services."

Have you seen action on either of those recommendations in a way that's changed the operations of your group and the lives of the women you serve?

•(1605)

Ms. Josie Nepinak: I could answer that first.

I think we have to understand that there is a war on indigenous women in Canada, not to mention the thousands of missing and murdered indigenous women. In order to address the shortfall, we need to start talking about a long-term comprehensive strategy, with funding. That strategy must be led by indigenous women in this country, particularly indigenous women who are experts in the area of family violence and can understand policy or how that works... and to address those gaps in funding.

The other thing is that we often talk about rural and remote first nations, rural vs. city. I think there has to be consideration to remove jurisdictional boundaries for equitable funding for all indigenous shelters and lodges in the country. Quite often, when women are going into the first nation shelter... I talked to my colleagues here in and around Calgary. The funding is so different for the first nation shelters on the reserve, where shelter directors actually have had to bring groceries from their own cupboards to feed the women and children in the shelter, which is terrible.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: It is terrible.

Thank you for saying it so clearly.

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Thank you.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Viviane, do you have anything to add?

[Translation]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Clearly, we talk about the importance of second-stage or transitional housing. Once women have completed their stay in the shelter, they still require follow-up support. Obviously, if they go to an urban area, they need second-stage housing, to help them build their financial independence and the capacity to function on their own.

Whenever any consultation is required, we insist that first nations representatives be included, both in terms of first nations women and those who work with them. When it comes to developing a strategic plan to address violence, the approach must be inclusive, consultation-based and collaborative.

Violence is such a multi-faceted issue. Québec Native Women launched an action plan to counter sexual violence in March, and mobilizing communities is an ongoing effort. The action plan is available on our website. Through the plan, we are taking an active role to address cases of sexual assault.

What is becoming more and more apparent at the shelter level is the lack of funding for women wishing to leave their violent situations. Who is going to cover those costs?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much, Viviane.

I'm glad you could read all my directions.

Ms. Viviane Michel: It was a great job.

The Chair: We're now going to turn the floor over to Emmanuella Lambropoulos for seven minutes.

You have the floor, Emmanuella.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): I'd like to begin by thanking both of the witnesses for being with us today.

[Translation]

My first question is for Mrs. Michel.

I know your organization does more than oversee women's shelters. How do you work with other shelters for indigenous women? What do you do exactly? How do you bring all of those players together?

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Québec Native Women has a network of 13 indigenous shelters. What we do depends on what the shelters ask us for. If they need more training on youth protection, for instance, we put together two-day training sessions. We also help victims of violence access legal services.

We give the shelters tools and resources—the training they need to operate with greater independence—and we provide what they need. Our organization doesn't make the decisions for the shelters. They give us their recommendations and proposals, and we give them the necessary training.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

I imagine you're quite familiar with shelters' needs.

My colleague asked you whether indigenous women had access to any culturally appropriate spaces. You said you served women in their mother tongue. Do the women who seek out your services speak a language other than English or French? Do they speak their specific indigenous language? Conversely, do they not have close ties to their culture?

• (1610)

Mrs. Viviane Michel: What makes urban shelters unique is that they serve a diverse clientele, including women from a number of different indigenous communities. For instance, Montreal is home to an Inuit population. Members of the Anishinabek and Mohawk communities are also present in different areas.

The workers don't speak all of those languages, so English or French tends to be the language used in urban shelters. Workers in other shelters speak the language of the community they are in.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Very good.

One of your recommendations was expanding the range of services available to indigenous women to better meet their needs. How would those services differ from those provided to non-indigenous women?

Mrs. Viviane Michel: For instance, awareness and prevention campaigns may be lacking. It's possible to have just four workers to cover three shifts. How can they possibly work on prevention or education? There aren't enough staff members.

It's easier at the community level, since everyone knows about the shelter's existence. In urban areas, though, how are people supposed to know they have access to a shelter? The two realities are quite different.

[English]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have three minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I have a question, but maybe I'm ignorant about the subject. I'd be glad if you could help me out here.

As Pam mentioned, a lot of the witnesses we saw in the previous study that we did, on the incarceration of indigenous women, spoke about the fact that a lot of these women didn't have much of their cultural background. They didn't really feel a connection to their

culture because of the residential school system that their parents or some of them had been through.

Would you say that the situation is different in Quebec? Do they have a stronger link to their culture than they do in the rest of Canada? Or is it similar in Quebec as well?

[Translation]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: I would say that, in Quebec, the issue of not being connected to one's culture is minor. Our 13 shelters take in individuals who belong to the community, speak the language of the community and have cultural ties. In urban areas, it is possible to encounter clients who don't feel connected to their culture, but it's a minor issue. Usually, women come from their own nation, with a connection to their culture and language.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I see. Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: To start our second round, we're now going to move it over to Ron Liepert.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll share my time with my colleague.

I guess either one of you could answer this question, but since I represent a Calgary riding, maybe Ms. Nepinak could start.

Do you have any data that would give some baseline as to the number of repeat clients—I can't think of a better word—you have to deal with, those who come back a second or a third time? Is there any data on that? If not, maybe just give me an idea. Does it happen often or almost never, that sort of thing?

• (1615)

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Certainly, the Province of Alberta would have that data, through our funders, through homeless supports. Internally, at our lodge, we see approximately up to 15% of women return to the shelter.

Now, we have to remember that there are different circumstances that happen in these situations. It might be a new relationship. It might be that the first time they left they were not ready, so they chose to go back. Family violence is a cycle. It will escalate. People will leave.

Yes, we do see some women come back.

Mr. Ron Liepert: Even though the number is not that high, would you say that one reason for that might be not having the proper supports system in place when they do return, especially if they go back to the existing circumstances?

Ms. Josie Nepinak: Oh, absolutely, it has a lot to do with that. I just gave the example that if a woman is returning to a northern community—let's say, Saddle Lake—it's difficult for us to provide transitional and support services or outreach to her when she returns home. We don't have mechanisms in place to connect with her home community to develop safety planning and supports within that community. We just don't have the resources to do that.

Mr. Ron Liepert: Okay. I'll turn it over to Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Really, my questions would be the same for you, Viviane. I would just return the same questions that my colleague just asked.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Victims do, indeed, leave their violent circumstances, only to return afterwards. Some are able to leave the situation for good, after taking legal steps, while others are unable to file a complaint out of fear.

I agree with what Ms. Nepinak said about the challenge of staying in contact with victims who return to remote communities. You can't put the victim's safety at risk by calling them at home, for instance. The victim has to be the one to set up a channel for communication. Similarly, I would say every shelter relies on the social worker in the community to provide that ongoing support.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay.

I guess my only other question is with regard to the fact that in most cases, it is a man who is being violent towards a woman, and then she needs to flee the situation in order to find a safe space. Is there any work being done with him to help make that a safe space that she can go back to, whether that's in the immediate time frame when she's separate from him or in the ongoing weeks and months ahead?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Viviane Michel: I believe that the need to work with men with violent behaviours is urgent. Places where that can be done have to be re-established or established.

Under the current system, if there are complaints and charges, the accused spent time in prison without their problem being treated. However, we in the First Nations have our own ways of reaching a solution, a healing process. It brings about a really radical change among those who go through it.

In the legal system, people go to prison and their problems with violence will never be dealt with. That's the issue. As well as the legal measures, there should be ways to help people solve their problems, which are all about wielding their power over others. So that is a shortcoming of the legal system in Quebec.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to Eva Nassif.

You have five minutes, Eva.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My thanks to our two witnesses for their presentations.

Let me start with you, Mrs. Michel. Thank you for travelling from Quebec.

Tell us about the women whom you turn away each year because of a lack of beds in your 13 shelters in Quebec.

Ms. Nepinak has told us that her organization receives 2,500 women per year and, as I understand it, she can only accept 250 and must turn away 1,200 per year. That is huge.

Tell us about what happens in Quebec, please.

• (1620)

Mrs. Viviane Michel: I worked in a shelter where we wanted to establish a day centre as well, precisely to work on prevention and awareness. It is a regional centre. That means that it has only four rooms with two or three beds, depending on the types of families that can be accepted.

I can tell you that, for a regional shelter, four rooms are not a lot. A really remote shelter, such as in Schefferville, can accept four women and their children. Of course, women will not leave without their children.

As for the numbers, I can't answer that, because I am not an inside worker at the moment. However, we are part of the shelter network.

We can send you the statistics on the shelters. We will be happy to do so.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: You must know whether there is a great shortage or whether the need in Quebec can be adequately met.

Are you aware of that? Even if you do not know the exact figures, can you give us an overview?

Mrs. Viviane Michel: I can tell you that, no, it is not enough. Just now, we were talking about confidentiality. In a community, everyone knows everyone else.

In Schefferville for example, people may not want to go to the shelter, which is just next door. That is because they know the women who work there and everyone is going to know who is in the shelter. That can be a major obstacle.

So the women are going to want to go to another shelter, in Quebec City or Sept-Îles, depending on which is closer. They want to choose for themselves where they want to go.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Do you have any data on the causes of this violence against women? Is it because of mental health problems, drug addiction, alcoholism?

Mrs. Viviane Michel: If you have to say where that violence comes from, I think you have to address the history of colonialism. Our people used to live in harmony with, and respect, everything around them. Because of that history, those values have changed. Violence has therefore become more prevalent.

In terms of the value of relationships, they were once equal for us. At the moment, with colonization and the Indian Act, more power was given to men. A system of paternalism then imposed itself.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: I have another question for you.

In your organization, you say that you equip the workers in the 13 shelters. You provide training and programs for young people, and so on.

What methods do you use to help young people understand how to go about reducing violence against women? What kind of education do you provide to those young people?

Mrs. Viviane Michel: We provide training for the workers. Each shelter then establishes its plan for the kids. It can be done through games or awareness workshops. However, I cannot give you a more detailed answer.

But I can tell you about the training we provide directly to the workers according to their needs.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: So your program exists only for the workers, not for the women who come to you with their children, for example.

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Quebec Native Women does not provide those programs. They are provided by the shelters.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Okay.

Do you know exactly what services they provide?

Mrs. Viviane Michel: When I worked in the shelters, one worker led the youth activities, always about violence, of course. However, you have to be careful because you have to recognize that, when that worker leaves, the work still has to be done.

So we got a summer student job, but afterwards, for the rest of the year, we had no worker to work directly with the kids.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Did you employ the same students each summer? Are you eligible for the student employment program?

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Yes.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you.

Mrs. Viviane Michel: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Absolutely perfect. Fantastic.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: I didn't calculate, but....

The Chair: You did a great job.

On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank Josie Nepinak, from the Awo Taan Healing Lodge, and Viviane Michel, from Quebec Native Women Inc.

We're going to suspend for two minutes, and then we'll be returning with our next panel.

•(1620) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1625)

The Chair: If everybody can return and take their seats, we'll get started with our next panel.

On our second panel today, we have Shar Chowdhury, transitional support worker at the Minwaashin Lodge. From the Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, we have Rebecca Kudloo, president; and Samantha Michaels, senior policy adviser.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Shar.

You have seven minutes.

Ms. Sharmila Chowdhury (Transitional Support Worker, Minwaashin Lodge): I am Shar Chowdhury, and I am a transitional support worker at Minwaashin Lodge here in Ottawa, which is attached to our indigenous women's shelter, Oshki Kizis Lodge. I am speaking here on behalf of our ED, Mary Daoust, and our shelter director, Frances Daly.

I've been working in this position for 16 years. Our transitional support workers work with indigenous women who are fleeing violence and help them with all the practical needs that come up as a result of that. It could be a treatment program, housing, income or safety planning. It could be any practical thing that a woman needs to move forward and create a safer life. That's what I do.

I'll just give you a little history of Minwaashin and the shelter. Minwaashin started in 1993, as the Aboriginal Women's Support Centre, but it is now called Minwaashin Lodge - Indigenous Women's Support Centre. The centre worked to open an abuse shelter specific to first nations, Métis and Inuit women. Oshki Kizis Lodge was opened in 2001 from a building donation, but with no government funding, for a violence against women shelter. It was considered a homeless/violence against women shelter at the time.

At that time, the other mainstream VAW shelters were fully funded by the government, and Oshki Kizis Lodge received full funding as a VAW-status shelter in 2008. I'd like to point out that Oshki Kizis Lodge is the only shelter for indigenous women fleeing abuse in all of eastern Ontario. We get first nations, Métis and Inuit women from across Canada and from the remote northern communities and reserves.

Often they flee because—as I think was mentioned in another panel before us—there is a lack of confidentiality and safety in the smaller communities. A lot of the shelter and community workers are their aunts or their cousins, and they don't have real anonymity to get away from the abuse, so that's how they sometimes end up in Ottawa, a bigger city with a little more anonymity.

The way they get here is.... Sometimes they're coming in from, say, Nunavut, and they're actually coming for medical treatment, or they're accompanying someone for medical treatment here in Ottawa, and that's their opportunity to escape and not have to return to their community.

Also, there are examples of women coming from across the country. There was a woman coming from out west who tried to flee her abusive partner. She went to Calgary, I think, and then just made her way eastward, but he kept finding her. She finally landed in Ottawa, where, to this day, he hasn't found her. There's that anonymity here in Ottawa that women sometimes are seeking.

In terms of numbers, we are a 21-bed shelter. We are consistently full. We serve approximately 90 women and 70 children per year. On average, we turn away about four women per week. Two, for sure, out of those four will be women who are actually fleeing violence. Sometimes people call, and their issue is more about being homeless, not about fleeing abuse.

That's kind of average, so we're turning away at least a hundred women per year due to a lack of shelter space. We actually try to accommodate women. Even though we have only 21 beds, we will put out cots. We will have them sleep on our couch in the public spaces that we have for ceremony or meetings, but when we do this, there's no extra funding to support the bed space, the food, the electricity or the water being used by these extra people we try to accommodate.

If they don't get space with us at Oshki Kizis, what often happens is that the city tries to place them in homeless shelters. I don't know how many of you are from here, but that would be places like Shepherds of Good Hope. In these places, the risk to indigenous women's safety is quite high. Oftentimes, even their abusive partner is already staying there. Our women who struggle with varied issues, possibly of addiction, are even more at risk, going to Sheps.

• (1630)

Then, what we find is that they're making unsafe choices because they can't get in with us. What they are doing is possibly going back to the abusive partner. They may couch surf in less than ideal circumstances, or stay on the streets, rather than stay at the options provided that are not our shelter.

I wanted to speak to an analysis to consider, and then the impact and what it means when women are turned away.... Oh, I did speak to that, but I just wanted to give the analysis. It's important to understand that the inherent trauma and the intergenerational trauma that have occurred from the historical, political, cultural and spiritual genocide of indigenous communities, along with the effects of colonization, have put these communities at a much larger risk of violence generally, and domestic/intimate partner violence specifically. That translates into a great need in this population for safe, indigenous-specific shelter space.

I have this thing I want to say about the bigger picture. For people who live in Ottawa, I think it needs to be considered that we're talking about shelter space. Do we have enough space? Would it be fixed by just having more beds or more shelters? I think we need to look at the bigger picture, too. There is currently a housing crisis in Ottawa. There's not enough affordable or subsidized housing. What this means is that women are staying longer in crisis shelters, because they can't get housing. It blocks a space for new women in crisis trying to come in. There's that issue.

Some of you may know that there are some new provincial initiatives, such as portable housing, where women can get market rent, which is a barrier to women.

I'm getting the wrap-up. Okay.

• (1635)

The Chair: You're getting the wrap-up, yes. We'll wrap it up. That will give you the opportunity.... When we do have some questions, we can get back into that, if that's okay with you.

Ms. Sharmila Chowdhury: Okay.

The Chair: We're now going to move over to—come on, Terry, help me out here—Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): I would defer to the expert, Ms. Kudloo.

The Chair: Rebecca and Samantha, you have seven minutes combined.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo (President, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ullukuut, members of Parliament, Chair, Vice-Chairs, guests and staff.

Pauktuutit is a national representative organization of Inuit women in Canada. We lead and support Inuit women through work and address our unique interests and priorities. We work for the social, cultural, political and economic betterment of Inuit women, their families and communities.

Our homeland is important to our culture and our way of life. The population is 65,000 and most live in 51 communities across Inuit Nunangat. Most of these communities are small, isolated and only accessible by plane. Also, over the past several years, the flow of Inuit into urban spaces has been happening, particularly women.

In 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed to gender equality for our women in Canada. The federal government also committed to reconciliation with indigenous peoples. Notably, the Minister of Status of Women, Maryam Monsef, was mandated to ensure that no one fleeing domestic violence is left without a place to turn, by growing and maintaining Canada's network of shelters and transition houses.

Despite this, violence against Inuit women and girls remains a systemic national crisis that requires urgent, informed and collaborative action. At the rate of 14 times the national average, the highest rate experienced by any group of women in Canada, violence is a preventable leading cause of injury and mortality in Inuit women. Family violence is compounded by poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, overcrowded housing, and suicide rates that are estimated to be nine to 20 times the national average.

Statistics Canada, from 2016, shows that over half of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat live in crowded housing, compared to the 8.5% of non-indigenous Canadians. Severe overcrowding, substandard homes and a lack of affordable and available housing options leave many women and their children unable to escape violence in one of the harshest climates in the world. Also, our population is very young and growing fast, with more than 50% of Inuit being 25 or younger. The number of poorly housed people will significantly increase if the physical housing shortage is not addressed.

Even with the highest rates of violence in the country, more than 70% of our communities across Inuit Nunangat do not have safe shelters for women. Often the homes of family and friends are overcrowded and food-insecure. Crisis and counselling services are also limited. Those experiencing violence and abuse in their homes often have no place in their community to seek safety. A plane ticket to another community may cost thousands of dollars, which is out of reach for most, particularly in times of crisis. In these cases, local social workers must arrange for a woman to be flown to another community.

There have been too many cases where the lack of access to safe alternatives in Inuit Nunangat has led to the loss of life.

• (1640)

Ms. Samantha Michaels (Senior Policy Advisor, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada): Programs and services are often underfunded and not sustainable, Inuit-specific or consistent between communities. In the north, many positions in health, mental health and social workers are left vacant. For the approximately 15 existing safe shelters and transition homes, very high occupancy rates, combined with daily challenges to meet operating and human resource requirements, contribute to high staff turnover—

The Chair: Sorry, can you just slow it down a bit for the interpreters?

Ms. Samantha Michaels: Sure.

They contribute to high staff turnover rates due to burnout, lack of peer support, and often inadequate training because of geographic isolation and limited financial resources. Frequently, there is a lack of dedicated long-term funding, since funding is generally project-based and time-limited, making sustainability a continual challenge.

Also, there is no second-stage housing in Inuit Nunangat, which can be crucial to women's efforts to re-establish a life without violence. When violence does happen, Inuit women are regularly met with a critical lack of services and support to help them escape violence as well as recover from its impacts. The lack of access to safe alternatives can force women to move thousands of kilometres from their homelands to urban centres.

Living in a southern Canadian city can be tremendously isolating. Without the proper culturally appropriate and relevant supports and services to overcome the wide-ranging effects of trauma, many women remain unsafe, and they can experience other related challenges that too often lead to increased vulnerability to violence and abuse.

Last, the provinces and territories are responsible for housing and safe shelters for women. Indigenous Services Canada provides operational funding to shelters on reserve and also reimburses the cost for off-reserve shelter services used by first nations peoples ordinarily on reserve.

The Chair: Slow it down just a tad, please. Thanks.

Ms. Samantha Michaels: Shelters serving Inuit women in the Arctic are disallowed from accessing this funding because they are not on a reserve. This specifically excludes the development and access to shelters in the north. This also contravenes article 22 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which declares:

States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

Just as the government funds shelters on reserves, so must they fund shelters in Inuit communities. In 2018, this is no longer acceptable.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: Every Inuit woman and girl deserves to life free from violence in her home and community. Pauktuutit recommends that Inuit women, in partnership with the federal government, advance a holistic strategy to ensure access to a high-quality, culturally safe continuum of prevention, intervention and after-care services and resources to provide for Inuit women and girls' safety, healing and long-term well-being.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're going to do our seven-minute round of questioning. We'll start with Marc Serré.

Marc, you have the floor for seven minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for the information. This will really help us with our study.

I'll continue with Minwaashin Lodge.

You mentioned the market rents. We heard in other testimony that one of the solutions is for women to buy homes after they have been temporarily in shelters. Is that your experience, that women have the funds or they're capable of buying homes?

Ms. Sharmila Chowdhury: No, I haven't heard about buying homes. I don't know of any clients who have left our shelter and bought homes. There are new initiatives in the province for what's called portable housing programs. If the woman is receiving income through social assistance, the province will top up a minimal amount. They will give her \$250 more, say, to use her shelter allowance with social assistance and that \$250 to possibly find market-rent housing.

There's a lot of critique from our shelter and from the violence against women community. They get this subsidy by being on the priority list for fleeing violence, but we're finding that, one, there isn't market rent out there for the amount they're getting. They need way more money to actually get market rent. Then, when they do, our women are being met with racism. Landlords will pick three or four people to interview, and our women will never get picked. So they're dealing with racism. Then there are even things like bidding wars. A landlord will offer a market rent unit at a certain price publicly, and our women will go.... It happened to one of our women. Someone else was there and offered to pay \$100 more a month, and the landlord just gave it to them. Our women can't compete or don't have the financial resources to be able to do that.

So, yes, there are a lot of barriers to access housing.

• (1645)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

The next question is for both of you.

When we talk about jurisdiction, we've heard from previous witnesses that the financial support from a province is even higher than the federal. It will be a bit different in Ottawa, but I'll ask you a question about municipalities, provinces and the jurisdiction there. In your case, I wanted to dig down a bit deeper to understand some of the recommendations.

Looking at the issues that you have with finances.... You mentioned that second-stage housing is not even in existence, so we have to find a better way to fund the model. What would be your recommendations on that aspect, looking at the jurisdictions? Can you recommend more on the federal government side?

Ms. Samantha Michaels: Maybe I'll begin, and then I'll turn to Rebecca.

The number one thing for us is that of course we want every single woman and child to have safe alternatives, but the reality is that building a shelter in a community where there are no other housing options, regardless of whether it's transition or second-stage, is such a band-aid solution. Women might be there for three days, in some communities, if they're lucky enough to live in a community with a shelter. Perhaps they're there for six weeks. However, where do you go if most people are living in overcrowded housing? Wait-lists can be years long.

It has to be a simultaneous investment, and yes, ensuring that there are safe alternatives that are responsive to the needs of Inuit women, not just what we see here in the south necessarily, and implementing that in the north. There also have to be massive investments in terms of healing and housing. I don't think we can look at it as a one-pronged approach.

Of course we're in favour of supportive living arrangements to get women back on their feet, whether it be through employment, life skills or counselling, but the reality is, where do they go next? That's where the danger is and where the harm is. That's why people make educated choices. They're not going to leave if there's nowhere for them to go with their children.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: Perhaps I can add further to the healing part.

In my community, when 30 children were sexually abused by a priest, we started a community-based counselling service. We started out with counselling on child sexual abuse, but we soon found out there was a lot of need in the community, so we have gone into all areas of family violence. That's a step where I fully believe that in order to heal we have to take ownership of our own healing. We hire a community worker. Of course, we always have a fully qualified social worker. We have been running it for 30 years. That's something that works in a small community, and they should be supported. Inuit, our people, should have a place where they can go for counselling in their language, if they wish to. It's something that I fully believe works.

It's so hard to get people who have all these degrees to come up and stay in a small community. They always leave. It's so important to build a relationship with a counsellor. People are tired of repeating their stories. They're not going anywhere with their healing if they have to repeat their story every time a new social worker or mental health worker comes into the community.

• (1650)

Mr. Marc Serré: I know you have barely enough funding to survive in terms of what you do now. Are there any specific recommendations to support the abuser, looking at men? We've had agencies from Halton and London here that actually go into the high schools and talk to high school students. Do you have any specific recommendations in terms of indigenous men?

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: Pauktuutit has a project called "Engaging Inuit Men and Boys". We look at things as holistically as we can. To help the women, we have to start helping our men, too. It has been very popular with the men. When we come into the community to do a workshop, they're starting their men's groups. That has been popular.

I just want to say one little thing. In terms of the program I was talking about, we get referrals from the courts for counselling.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to Rachael Harder, for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Awesome. Thank you.

Ms. Kudloo, my first question is for you.

You said in a statement a few minutes ago, "[W]e have to take ownership of our own healing." Can you talk a little more about what you meant by that statement?

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: Yes. In order to run a program such as the one I was talking about, the counselling part, we need support, of course, from the government. We were lucky; we got support from our community to start. However, we also did a lot of education on child sexual abuse and how it affects the victims, because in a small community sometimes the offender gets more support than the victim.

It takes a lot of courage and energy to do something such as that, to try to educate your people to start recognizing that if we don't do anything, this will keep going on.

Ms. Rachael Harder: One of the things I have heard from women who have been victims of violence is that they had to come to a place where they were going to take ownership of their own healing and moving forward. That's not to say that the perpetrator gets to go free. Not at all. He is responsible for his actions as well, and he has to take responsibility for them and pay any penalty that comes with them.

But one of the things women have often shared with me is that until they came to that place where they were able to invest in their own healing and believe in themselves, in their value, their worth, their dignity, and the fact that they were strong and able to move forward, until they came to that point, they continuously returned to a poor situation and put themselves in that vulnerable place.

Do you find this in your work on the ground at all?

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: Yes. I think we still have a long way to go in educating some women about their rights. A lot of them don't know sometimes what their basic human rights are.

Samantha, did you want to add a comment?

Ms. Samantha Michaels: Yes.

Definitely. I'll pick up on what Rebecca is noting around prevention, education and awareness. I completely agree with everything you're saying, but I think we also have to come back to the basic fact that we have to ensure there are still places for these women to go and that no one can heal or be safe in a toxic environment. We need to recognize that violent acts come from an environment of violence, so we need to remove that person until maybe the supports can all come together holistically.

I agree that prevention, education and awareness are definitely things we strive to increase.

• (1655)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Right. The question is whether, if these women are not provided with the opportunity to go.... Clearly, they found the strength to leave a negative situation, and that is a tremendous act of bravery and courage, but if they're not given an alternative, many of these women will return.

How do we better empower them to start a new life?

Ms. Samantha Michaels: I think the issue is that they are forced to return. We see a lot of women flee south. Women do come to the south for opportunity, whether it's education, employment, a change of lifestyle, or whatever it is, but we also see that women are being pushed out of the community. We call it migration, but I see it as an ongoing episode of forced relocation because there are no services, programs, and resources in the community, so people are left without

a choice in some cases and have to flee south, or they are following their children, or whatever it is.

We're seeing it disproportionately affect women in all of the major urban centres.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: Also, when they come down, sometimes they run into other problems because they are vulnerable when they come down. Other people take advantage of them, so that's a problem. They don't have support when they come down.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Ms. Chowdhury, do you want to weigh in?

Ms. Sharmila Chowdhury: I was listening to you, and I think you said, how do we empower women to make these choices? Is that what your question was?

Ms. Rachael Harder: How do we empower them to start a new life?

Ms. Sharmila Chowdhury: I was sitting here listening to that, and I thought we need the resources. It's not even just programs and supports. If we're going to talk about this, I always like to dream big. Let's make more housing. Let's have more housing options available. The practical things need to be in place for them to be empowered to make those choices.

There's the internal work of getting empowered, of feeling worth and feeling confident, but then there are the external conditions that need to be there for them to say, "I'm going to work towards that."

I think that's the hardest, the lack of resources or lack of services, the practical realities that allow them to really move.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Can you comment on whether or not you have senior women who come into your centre, and if so, what are the unique needs among that demographic?

Ms. Sharmila Chowdhury: Yes, we have our grandmas.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Can you talk a bit about the unique needs of that demographic?

Ms. Sharmila Chowdhury: All of a sudden, I'm going through every single client I've ever worked with. That's what you saw me doing there. But also just knowing....

I could speak to what I think some of the issues are. It's kind of for everyone, but the senior women are being uprooted from their communities and coming here, and not having services in their language, things like that. There are barriers. There are different barriers and a feeling of more isolation, and where they're going to go from here if they left their whole communities and families.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move over to Sheila Malcolmson. You have the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

Just in case there's any misinterpretation, I'm sure my Conservative colleague didn't mean that it's women's attitude problems that are resulting in one woman being killed every six days in Canada. It's violence that is killing them.

The very sad thing we're learning through this study is that when women ask for help, they often get turned away. The problems in the north are especially deep. As you said, unless you're wealthy enough to be able to buy a plane ticket out, then you stay home with violence, or you leave all your supports in the community and then you're vulnerable and may fall into violence or exploitation in other ways. It's a terrible problem.

One of the very first witnesses we heard was Status of Women Canada. The experts and the staff said the same stuff that you just gave us from Pauktuutit. About 70% of the 53 Inuit communities have no access to shelters. That's well known inside government. It hasn't changed in the three years that this feminist government has been in, this first-nations-and-indigenous-committed government.

Why would you say that hasn't changed yet?

• (1700)

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: I don't have the answer.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: It's kind of heartbreaking. This felt like our moment, and yet it hasn't changed for women.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: If I could add, with regard to the lack of shelters.... In my 35 years of being involved in this area, I know of 30 women and their kids who have been murdered in their homes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thirty? Wow.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: That's why we were saying that Inuit are distinct and have distinct needs. It's really hard up north trying to get resources, because of the high costs of building anything. One thing I have been bringing up is that, when women are being abused, especially if they have kids, they are going out into -30°C or -40°C to get away.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: This is yet another reason not to leave. The women who do, and who ask for help, are particularly in danger and their kids are under threat.

Through this study, we're trying to get support from the federal government so that it's consistent across the country. Can you give us an idea of a recommendation that if you read it in our final report, you would say, "Yes, they got it. Things will be different if the government says yes."

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: We are still asking for more shelters, but we are also asking for healing programs that are suitable to our people, like the one I mentioned, which is community-based and in our language.

Ms. Samantha Michaels: I think it's a lot, too, about the consultation with the different regions, because it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. We're not suggesting that what works in Hamilton, Ontario, for instance, will necessarily work in Rigolet in Nunatsiavut. They do have a safe.... That maybe wasn't a good example. Nonetheless, I think that it has to be designed in consultation with Inuit women for Inuit communities, taking into account the realities of the north.

Further to what someone had asked about men and boys, we often hear that men and boys are really struggling. There need to be the holistic supports that Rebecca keeps mentioning, which are so important.

Again, it's also about understanding that families operate differently—and they want to operate differently in some contexts—and that it can't just be this one-size-fits-all shelter. We need to figure out the best alternatives that will keep women safe and their children safe in their communities, without having to force them to flee to other communities or to the south, if that's not their choice. A lot of times, quite frankly, it's not.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you so much to the witnesses. We're going to use a lot of your advice in our report.

Chair, if I may, while I have the floor—

Ms. Rachael Harder: You can't promise that. The Liberals will dictate that.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Well, it will be in my report, then, at a minimum.

While I have the floor, can I please return to the motion that I gave notice of a couple of weeks ago, about forced sterilization of indigenous women?

The Chair: Yes. Do you have the motion there so that everybody can hear the motion once again?

• (1705)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: The motion was modified by the clerk and it's being distributed.

The Chair: Fantastic.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: The motion that I moved originally was to invite the health minister. The advice that we got from some of the other committee members was that it would be more appropriate to bring in the indigenous services minister, Jane Philpott. The clerk agreed to modify the wording a bit.

The issue has been well described in the media. There are terrible stories. We thought that they were stories from the past. It turns out that, as recently as 2017 in Saskatchewan, there were indigenous women who were told, after giving birth, that they couldn't even hold their children unless they agreed to tubal ligation.

Some of the women who are parties to the class action lawsuit said that they didn't even know they had been sterilized. It's heartbreaking, and these are terrible stories.

I feel that this committee would be a good place for us to hear directly from the minister about what leadership the government is bringing to make sure that no province or territory is able to do this.

I'll read the motion:

That the Committee invite the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada to appear no later than December 2018 to brief the Committee on the government's efforts to immediately end the practice of forced and coerced sterilization of Indigenous women, pursuant to the Minister's mandate for a "renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership" and the government's commitment to Article 7(2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and that the meeting be televised and no less than one hour in length.

The Chair: Excellent.

Are there questions or comments?

We'll begin with Pam.

Ms. Pam Damoff: First, I can assure the witnesses that their testimony will be included in what we are reporting.

On the motion, I'd like to propose an amendment that says "or department officials". The reason for that is the timing that we have. It may be difficult to get the minister to appear.

I know that all of us are deeply concerned about the reports coming out and share the outrage of all Canadians at what is being reported and what is happening to these women.

I'm going to propose an amendment to it, given the timing, so that we can try to get some answers on what's happening. I know the minister—I've spoken to her myself—is very engaged in the issue, and is as concerned as we are about what has been happening.

The Chair: Okay.

The amendment is to include the department officials if the minister is not able to come.

Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Go ahead, Sheila.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'll say that if the minister isn't able to come, that will be a disappointment. This is absolutely an issue of leadership. What we need to telegraph and be able to ask about is political leadership, not a staff answer.

I appreciate that this may be a bit of a safety valve, but I urge as strongly as possible that it be the minister who comes.

The Chair: Eva, you had a comment?

Mrs. Eva Nassif: We have only next week. Just because of the time and the short notice, instead of having nobody talk, the minister's officials will be able to.... They are briefed. They know what they are doing, and they're helping her. They will give us a brief.... If she cannot come, it's better than having nobody.

The Chair: Sheila, go ahead.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: That is fair. I did give notice two weeks ago, and we could have voted on it then, except the Conservatives withheld permission for us to be able to vote at that time.

The minister has certainly been aware. In other committees, this has been raised, and it has been voted down, so there is some feeling that the government doesn't want to speak to this. The minister has known that we want this to happen, and I urge her in the strongest terms to accept the invitation.

The Chair: Pam, go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I know that the minister was asked by Rachel Blaney at committee about this issue. I believe Minister Philpott is also appearing at the health committee, where people can ask questions about it. It's not that these ministers have not been in committee to be asked these questions.

That's all we have to say.

The Chair: Are there any further questions or comments before we vote?

Bob, go ahead.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): I'd like to call the question.

The Chair: Let's call the question on the amendment, of course, first.

The amendment is to include a member from the department. Do we need to read it, or is everybody okay without reading the full amendment?

• (1710)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Could we have a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: Okay.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 1 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Is there any further discussion as we carry on to the full motion with the amendment included, or are we ready for the vote?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Fantastic. Is there anything further?

Okay, we're going back to business and resetting the clock.

Bob, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you very much.

Thanks to our witnesses, again.

Legal matters have come up from time to time in our discussion today. What access, typically, would these women have to legal advice? I'm sure they must find themselves in legal situations, perhaps responding to an attack and then having an assault charge, or anything else. I can imagine that there are many legal issues. Typically, would there be someone on staff? Is there easy access for them to get legal advice?

This is for anybody.

Ms. Sharmila Chowdhury: Here, in a city like Ottawa, we transitional support workers connect women to legal aid and lawyers.

We will even go with them to lawyers. I have to say, though, that many of our women won't report. They won't access the family law system around custody access, but we do give them the options. We offer support to follow through. That is available here, and we do support them through all the Children's Aid Society legalities they might be involved with. We help them get a lawyer to represent them, to help them get their kids back.

Mr. Bob Bratina: So, the legal aid system would be available if they chose to use it.

Ms. Sharmila Chowdhury: Yes.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Ms. Kudloo, go ahead.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: Up north, there's a big backlog in the circuit court system, and women will wait months and months for their court.... You know, if the husband is going to court, they're going to have to wait. It's not....

I'm sorry, English is my second language, and sometimes I get....

If you want to go further....

Ms. Samantha Michaels: I think the circuit court system, as Rebecca just mentioned, is a really good place to start on the effectiveness of the justice system across the north. There's definitely a lack of access to justice. There's a lack in terms of knowing your rights, which Rebecca also spoke to and which is something that we work hard on.

We're undertaking a project with the Nunavut legal society in looking at the Family Abuse Intervention Act. It's something that I'm deeply passionate about, just in terms of understanding emergency protection orders, no-contact orders and restraining orders. We'll find out, but they're not super effective when you live in a community of fewer than 1,000 people where there's one grocery store and everyone knows each other. There are definitely different elements of that.

The circuit court will typically visit communities two to six times a year, and that's weather-dependent. It can be held off for a very long time, so it leaves women in a very vulnerable position. We know that lethal violence obviously increases after someone has reported. There's definitely a lack of access to justice around that.

Also, as Shar just said, people are terrified to report, of course, because of child apprehension, etc., and people not being in support of the victim, especially when victim-blaming attitudes permeate a lot of communities or institutionally.

Mr. Bob Bratina: You led me to one of my many other questions. How many languages are spoken in Inuit communities? There are 51 communities and 165,000 Inuit, or something like that.

• (1715)

Ms. Samantha Michaels: It's 65,000.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Do they all speak the same language? I don't think so.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: They speak the same language, but there are different dialects. When you're providing services for people with different dialects, it sometimes gets expensive translating for their dialects.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Right.

There's another issue that has come up. I was upset when the Churchill railway had a problem, but I know we got that fixed. Now there's money going to Nanisivik to create the new refuelling station for the Coast Guard in the north. We've heard of cruise ships coming into those communities. Would a stronger economic situation in the Far North be helpful in terms of the struggles that people are having?

I know that in many cases, in the south and in my community, coping skills quite often collapse when finances collapse. Would more attention to the economic situation, especially in the Far North, be helpful in these terms?

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: Just before I came down here, I had a meeting with Agnico, a gold mine in Baker Lake. It's two weeks in and two weeks out for the workers, and all the women are left to survive at home with the children. We were looking at maybe starting a cottage industry for them; women like to work at home. Those are some things we're looking into.

Also, I'll get Samantha to talk a bit about the women's business network that we run at the Pauktuutit board.

Ms. Samantha Michaels: It's a bit of a different situation across Inuit Nunangat in terms of the fact that there's a large unemployment rate. I think it's double what it is in the south. However, women are more employed than men, which actually can create its own tensions. Much of the time, even though they may have more jobs, they're being paid less. They may be in lower positions. We see that quite frequently.

Yes, it's something that we definitely work on at Pauktuutit. We've created the Inuit women in business network to recognize that a lot of women are engaging in different ways in an informal economy and that they all can be a part of it. We're helping to promote business mentorship and all sorts of skills and development, but there are many challenges in terms of child care—lack of access, availability and affordability—that prevent women from engaging in the formal economy should they choose to.

A lot of this is because of social policies that are just not aligned. There's a lot of misalignment. That comes back a lot to social housing policies.

Mr. Bob Bratina: That's very interesting, because if it's the woman who is making money, that could create a problem, as you suggested.

Thanks for those insights.

The Chair: That was an excellent job.

Before I turn it over to Rachael, I do have one question, and it's very non-partisan. I know everybody is saying, "She actually has a question today."

You indicate that there are 65,000 people living over approximately 51 communities. What does that look like? Do some communities maybe have 100 people and some have 10,000? Could you be a little more specific, comparing the large and the extremely small?

I'll let everybody else talk afterwards.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: We have bigger centres like Iqaluit, the capital, as well as Rankin Inlet. Those are probably 2,000 to 3,000.

The Chair: Did you say 2,000 to 3,000?

Ms. Samantha Michaels: Iqaluit is 7,000.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: Iqaluit is 7,000, but a small community like mine would have 1,800. The further up you go, like Grise Fiord... I don't know the exact population, but it's maybe 200.

• (1720)

The Chair: Excellent. I'm from Sparta, so I understand 200 just perfectly. Thank you so much, Rebecca.

I'm now going to pass it over to Rachael Harder for five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Ms. Kudloo, maybe you could talk a little bit about the uniqueness of housing within Nunavut.

The reason I ask is that I have had the opportunity to visit. I visited 11 communities in the northern region just in March, in the Baffin Island area, and I had the opportunity to talk with women first-hand with regard to the housing insecurity they face.

Of course, you've made mention of this, but perhaps you could talk a bit more about the fact that home ownership isn't really an option. They're at the mercy of the state, really, providing housing for them. There is a huge shortage, so we're seeing families basically living on top of one another in their homes.

When women access a shelter and they stay there for a time, eventually they want to leave and they want to enter into secure housing, but of course that's difficult. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: A lot of our people live in low-rent housing, and there is a long waiting list. People sometimes wait for years to get a house. If a woman wants to get her own place, I think she would go to the bottom of the list, unless it is an emergency.

Home ownership is not really an option. For some of us who own our homes, the cost of maintenance is very high, if you don't have a family member who will do it for free. You rely on companies that come in to fix things in your house, and the cost is very high. You have to have a well-paying job in order to pay for that. Fuel costs and municipal services costs are very high.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I would like to move my motion at this time. It's on notice.

The Chair: Does everybody have a copy of the motion?

Go for it, Rachael.

Ms. Rachael Harder: My motion reads:

That the Committee invite the Minister of Status of Women Canada to brief the Committee on her new mandate, given that Status of Women Canada is changing to the Department of Women and Gender Equality, no later than Wednesday, February 13, 2019, and that this meeting be no less than one hour in length.

Madam Chair, the reason I'm asking for this motion to be passed today is that, as outlined in the motion, this particular department has changed from simply being Status of Women to now including gender equality. In the original mandate letter... We haven't seen a follow-up from the Prime Minister, which is another reason why I'd be interested in bringing the minister to committee, so that we'd better understand what the mandate is here.

In the original mandate letter that the Prime Minister wrote to Minister Monsef, he said:

We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government. It is time to shine more light on government to ensure it remains focused on the people it serves. Government and its information should be open by default. If we want Canadians to trust their government, we need a government that trusts Canadians. It is important that we acknowledge mistakes when we make them. Canadians do not expect us to be perfect—they expect us to be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest.

He goes on to say that this would include “meaningful engagement with Opposition Members of Parliament, Parliamentary Committees and the public service; constructive dialogue with Canadians, civil society, and stakeholders, including business, organized labour, the broader public sector, and the not-for-profit and charitable sectors”.

Madam Chair, the reason I raise this is that I brought this motion forward a number of weeks ago and it was turned down by the Liberal members at this table. I'm confused as to why they put it on

hold, knowing that it would then be stopped because of the date that was on the motion.

So I've changed that date to now say February 13, 2019, therefore giving us a little more time to bring the minister forward. Given that the Prime Minister is committed to openness and transparency, and that the minister of this department has been called on to be open with us as a committee, as well as with those of us who are members of the opposition, I would put this motion forward and ask that we be able to bring the minister forward to this committee and be able to ask her questions with regard to her new mandate, so we would be better able to do our job on this committee.

• (1725)

The Chair: Just to comment on that, the motion was not turned down. The debate was stopped. I had to clear that up.

Sheila, you have the floor for questions and comments.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

I have a motion. I propose that the words “and that the meeting be ___”

The Chair: Is this an amendment?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: It's an amendment. It would read: “and that the meeting be televised”.

The Chair: Okay.

Are there any further questions or comments?

(Amendment negated [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Is there any further debate on the main motion to have the minister appear before February 19, 2019?

(Motion negated)

The Chair: Let's see where we're at for timing.

Sonia, I'm going to give you only one question, because I'm looking at the time. I know you've been patient, so we're going to put the clock on you for a couple of minutes. Go ahead.

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

Thank you all for being here and for your testimony.

Ms. Kudloo, do you think the project “Engaging Inuit Men and Boys” is making a difference?

Ms. Rebecca Kudloo: I think so. It's been very popular. We try to go to as many communities as we can with the funding that we get. I think at least 30 men usually show up, which is a high number in a small community. There's been a lot of interest, and also the land claims presidents I sit with at ITK have been very interested in bringing more of that into their community.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: We heard from Viviane Michel on the previous panel that women mostly love their partners but don't like their behaviour, so that kind of counselling is going to benefit the 51 communities.

Have you heard about the 24-hour Talk4Healing helpline? Some communities have a helpline for women. Are they in all communities, or only some of them?

Ms. Samantha Michaels: I know that there are obviously some national helplines. I'm not sure how many of them would have Inuktitut and the different dialects available to women calling. We also have to remember that a lot of women don't have access to a phone. I mean, obviously some do, but there are people who do not. In times of crisis, maybe that's something that could be taken away from them.

So it's great, and I definitely see value in a helpline, but if you're in a critical situation in a remote community thousands of kilometres away and you require immediate help, it's nowhere near good enough.

The Chair: Great.

On behalf of the committee, Shar, Rebecca and Samantha, thank you for coming. You've given us some wonderful information.

Just as a reminder, on Wednesday, December 5, the committee will meet to discuss the following. We will be looking at the work plan and the press release for the study on senior women, as well as the drafting instructions to the analysts for the study on shelters and transition houses. We will also have discussions about the next steps for the draft report on the barriers facing women.

See you on Wednesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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