

November 25th, 2020

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every committee member serving Canadians on the House of Commons Status of Women Committee.

Shedding light on how Covid-19 has and continues to impact women is invaluable work to enhance the safety and wellbeing of Canadian women.

My views in this submission are my views and shared by many of my colleagues in policing. In no way does this submission represent the views of my employer.

Sadly, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected many Canadians in unimaginable ways. I have witnessed the health, social, economic and criminal impacts associated or directly as a result of this unprecedented pandemic.

I am an active police officer for the past 26 years. Currently I serve on the frontlines responding to urgent 911 calls for service in the community. I have witnessed firsthand the many impacts of Covid-19.

In my capacity as an investigator, I have worked in many specialized areas that include the Sex Crimes Unit, investigations involving the exploitation of women and girls and investigations involving missing and murdered Indigenous women in Manitoba. Additionally, I have also investigated countless criminal domestic abuse cases.

Having seen the harsh realities of violence against women, prior to the Covid-19 the pandemic, the pandemic has magnified and/or cause additional challenges in an already complicated world. As this is a broad topic for discussion, I will narrow my focus and briefly outline my areas of concern.

The necessity for public health measures to mitigate Covid19 exposure risks, such as quarantining, physical distancing or working from home, partial or complete shutdown were implemented, has created unintended consequences.

These consequences include an accessibility gap for those seeking immediate face to face resources for social and mental health services or a partial or complete shutdown of critical services in the community such as shelters, counselling services, housing, addictions resources, drop-in centres and frontline outreach.

As a result, many are having difficulty coping. Addictions are on the rise, and many with underlying mental health issues are experiencing symptoms intensifying and coming the forefront. In particular during this pandemic I have observed a stark increase of high-risk female youths being reported as missing and subsequently located by police. While missing though, this significantly increases the risk of exploitation and being the victim of a serious crime.

It is challenging for police as police are the first called in a crisis. In these situations, police are limited in the resources they are able to offer for people who are in an immediate crisis. Currently there is a lack of **immediate services** for mental health and addiction resources.

As a result of the pandemic it has been reported that the government has asked prisons and parole to consider releasing inmates, offenders to curb the spread of Covid-19.

This is concerning as offenders charged with violent offences, on charge with violent offences or criminal record of violent offences are being released by the courts pending their next court date. Often the next day.

This is particularly concerning in cases of domestic abuse between intimate partners. Sadly, these cases are not the minority. I attribute these releases to the Covid-19 pandemic to void the jails of the risk of Covid-19 along with cost saving measures. This is unacceptable.

The implementation of Covid19 measures in correctional institutions needs to be implemented both to the protect offender and victims of crime alike. Recidivism is high and our judicial system is a revolving door. I believe this is contributing factor in the spread of covid19 both in institutions and in the community.

The safety of women in Canada needs to be a priority. Women fearful of physical violence and or death by their partner need to be reassured that the Canadian judicial system is therefor them.

I am willing to speak to my submission in more detail if need be. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rejeanne Caron