



Brief for the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Study of the Women and Girls in Sport

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Dear Standing Committee Members,

Impact Statement

In the 1980s, at Prince of Wales School in Vancouver, British Columbia, a science teacher began grooming me at 13 years old. He encouraged me to try out for the Quest Outdoor Education Program at 14. I was accepted into the program at 15. The science teacher became one of three middle-aged teachers who ran Quest when I was 16. The sport they used to cover up their abuse and gain access to children was “wilderness adventure.”

It is a profound mistake to believe that abuse is rampant in Canadian sport because of competition, international opportunities, medals. The kind of abuse you are investigating in sport occurs in *all* Canadian organizations that involve children, youth, and young adults.

All three teachers were sexual abusers working together, abusing together. This is textbook. It is easier to normalize abuse when other adults---respected, empowered, trusted adults like coaches and teachers---witness but do not stop the abuse. Imagine how intense this normalization is when the Athletic Director or higher level sports agencies also do not stop the abuse. Imagine how intense the normalization is when the police seem unwilling or unable to stop the abuse.

The Quest room was directly across the hall from the Administrative Offices of the principal, vice-principal, and school counselors. They did not stop the abuses.

A documentary film has been made about Quest entitled “[School of Secrets](#).” In 2021, [another Canadian School](#) is described with this identical phrase which is indicative of the urgent need for change. After years when the rumours about the Quest program were impossible to ignore, my principal wrote a glowing letter of recommendation for the teacher who was being fired and would ultimately be charged and convicted.

All three teachers sexually abused multiple students. Two married the final students they had groomed and sexually engaged with in high-school. One had a long term relationship with one student after leaving his wife and three children. The student suffered a debilitating depression.

In early 2000, victims now middle-aged were finally believed by police. One teacher was charged and convicted. He spent two years [house-arrest](#) with multiple counts of sexual abuse. Many were appalled by the light sentence.

The other two teachers have not been charged although one admitted to B.C. College of Teachers that he had a [sexual relationship](#) with a teenaged student. She was my contemporary. I and five other students regularly witnessed their sexual relationship when we were on a wilderness trip in the Yukon and were completely dependent on these teachers to survive. My science teacher was obviously engaged with another contemporary teen. My resistance to their sexual advances resulted in relentless humiliation and ultimately being abandoned in Dawson Creek for several days. I was 17.

I cannot convey to you how much the teen brain balks at sexual engagement between a teacher and student. It doesn't make sense. Dependent victims become [blind to betrayal](#) in order to survive which leaves significant, lasting trauma. The brain cannot understand this perversion of what has been taught since kindergarten, “obey your teacher,” which is very dangerous. As neuroscientist [Michael Merzenich](#) explained to me when the “brain can't answer the question” all neurological systems degrade. The brain fills with “noise and chatter” and cannot function. These are the conditions for a “depressive suicidal swamp.”

As a middle-aged woman, when I finally reported to police the abuse done to me, they told me they had 50 victim statements and would not be pursuing charges against the two teachers.

As a teenager, I developed an eating disorder, coped with dissociation, self-harmed by cutting, spent many hours with psychologists and psychiatrists to whom I did not disclose I had been emotionally, physically, and sexually abused by three teachers. I lived with anxiety, depression, and borderline personality disorder for many years.

I did not have the knowledge, words, understanding, experience to report. I have only attained them by having to go through this trauma for a second time. I was impacted as a student by rampant, normalized, entrenched, and enabled child abuse and again, thirty years later as a teacher witnessing the abuse and the broken system. I tried everything in my power to protect students and failed.

The systems we presently have in place in Canada protect enablers and perpetrators, not victims. A former Deputy Minister and abuse survivor has written a [white paper](#) that examines child safety in each province and territory and discovers an utter lack of effective mechanisms. It outlines exactly what's needed to keep athletes and students in our country far safer going forward.

What motivates me to advocate for athletes, and all children, youth, young adults, is that nothing has changed since I was a teenager. According to recent data from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection [educator sexual abuse is on the rise](#). This is why I am grateful to present to you on December 5, 2022, why I research and write about systemic abuse and its damage to the brain, and why I work with [SECE.info](#) in our shared mission to see significant systemic change to protect children, youth, and young adults from abuse in sports, schools, and everywhere else.

From Past to Present and the Shocking Realization: Nothing Has Changed

In 2015 I wrote *Teaching Bullies: Zero Tolerance on the Court and in the Classroom* about [abuse in sports](#) that went to number one on Amazon in the sport psychology category and has led

to me presenting repeatedly to the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, to the National Alliance of Youth Sports who recently [featured my new book](#) *The Bullied Brain* and to the Ontario Coaches Association multiple times. Many are striving for an athlete-centric, safe, healthy change in our sport organizations.

In 2012, student-athletes reported to me they were being abused by four teachers coaching basketball at a school where I was teaching. Female and male students reported being regularly humiliated, sworn at, shamed, belittled, abandoned, put down, threatened, made afraid, punished for speaking up, ignored, and some were targeted for repeat assaults in scenes of public shaming. Along with offensive statements such as “fucking retards,” “we’re going to take them to the crematorium,” “we need to sharpen our knives to go scalp-hunting” (particularly offensive with an Indigenous athlete on the team), the boys were lambasted with homophobic slurs: “grow some balls,” “you’re fucking soft,” “fucking pussies.” In short, both female and male athletes described a culture of fear, favoritism, and humiliation.

As is typical, we found out the school administrators had already been alerted at least a year earlier in a detailed report by a parent who is also a lawyer, but they had not protected students or informed parents. Throughout the year, administrators heard from other parents abuse was occurring and still did nothing and were not transparent.

The school administrators paid for two “investigations.” The first was never shared; the second was published widely by the Headmaster who had promised student-athletes confidentiality and protection from the coaches the following year. He did not keep either promise and instead exposed them via falsehoods to further abuse and trauma. Again typical, student-athletes were further traumatized by sham investigations. Not just one, but two. One paid for by school administrators, one paid for by taxpayers.

The school administrators did not report at any point to the BC Commissioner for Teacher Regulation (TRB). I fulfilled my legal duty to report to the TRB and watched first hand a travesty of justice that further harmed student-athletes. A new Commissioner (retired judge near 80) was parachuted into office by government; he bypassed his experienced in-house

investigators, picked up the phone and directly called an investigator used previously by the government to write exonerating reports, who had no experience with child abuse. The Commissioner's reports are in my office and they are glaringly corrupt.

He re-victimized student-athletes as "too sensitive." He faulted them for listening to the teachers' "obscenities." These reports were to be kept confidential and not shown to the thirty other parents involved or their children who had reported the abuse. I took the corruption and dereliction of duty to the Ombudsperson's Office. After three years, they sent a twelve page whitewash letter saying nothing happened and they weren't going to do anything. I replied with 80 pages of documentation to no avail. The story was covered in the [Toronto Star](#) and by [CTV W5](#). In 2015, despite shining a spotlight on abuse in sport and the enabling of abuse in sport nothing has changed. I am hopeful we make historic, lasting change with the work you are undertaking in 2022.

I resigned from this school in protest and was hired at another school. In my second year, there was a sexual abuse issue that resulted in a former teacher, now school administrator being barred from campus and fired. The B.C. TRB did not record on his certificate any discipline until I worked with another parent to have it documented. A whitewash explanation reported he had exchanged inappropriate texts with students and had his teaching certificate terminated in B.C. He went to teach in Saskatchewan and now is working in educational leadership in England. This teacher lives with his latest abuse victim.

In my third year at this school, a student reported to me she was being "sexually harassed" by the school principal. She was an International Student and had lived with him as a "home stay father." He was married with three children who were grown up and had left home. The principal was suspended. A police investigation went on for months. They tried to engage the student in a "restorative justice" process and told her this meant the principal would not get charged. They then told her she was too mentally unstable. Charges were not laid.

The school covered up saying the principal was on sick leave, then stress leave, then retiring early. They celebrated him and his service to the school (although he was not present) in front of

his victim who they knew had attempted suicide two weeks before. She went to university and the principal contacted her again and met with her. She wrote me continuously during this time and this final meeting appeared to make her so confused she fully lost her mind. She was full of guilt and self-loathing. She came to think of herself as the perpetrator for getting him fired while he was the innocent victim whose only mistake was caring for a 17 year old girl.

She took her life on November 21, 2017.

I no longer teach. The psychological impact on me has been to revisit my own abuse, suffer extreme panic attacks, suffer intense depression and anxiety. I was very vocal with the Ombudsperson's Office, Ministry of Education, Representative for Children and Youth, that the corruption at the TRB puts at-risk students like mine in danger. Their brains cannot understand if they are the perpetrator or victim because the system protects the teacher and not the student.

My advocacy on behalf of child safety resulted in me being put under investigation for not reporting to the TRB. The police said I did everything correctly and they would defend me. The school administrators had assured them and me they had reported to the TRB which means I am not supposed to. As the special victims' officer told me "someone is lying." She stepped down from her position after my student committed suicide. The TRB dropped point after my lawyer intervened.

In my book, [*The Bullied Brain: Heal Your Scars and Restore Your Health*](#), I learned that like the vast majority of victims my brain has been harmed. The damage is visible on brain scans. Most importantly, the damage can be repaired. If my student had known this, she too could have recovered from the abuse done to her by the principal.

She and the student-athletes at the other school could have been spared the re-victimization that plagues the Canadian system and perpetuates the abuse cycle. Our system that should protect victims and instead re-victimizes contributes to the urgent mental illness crisis in our child and youth populations.

All adults and children need to know the brain science. It is life-saving.

Overview of Research

In the 1980s while I was being abused, two leading European psychiatrists discovered in their research that child abuse was rampant in society, devastating to victims, and cyclical in nature. Namely, the victim of abuse had a far more likely chance to become the perpetrator of abuse. Their research firmly placed the abuse into the very structure of society so that family life and educational life exposed children to “[poisonous pedagogy](#).”

In the 1990s, two American medical doctors conducted [extensive research](#) that documented child abuse was rampant and directly correlated with mid-life chronic disease and shortened lifespan. Child abuse manifested in later life as addiction, self-harm including suicide, mental illness, entering into the criminal justice system and chronic illness such as cancer, diabetes, heart-disease etc.

Research into sport indicates that [70% of children](#) leave organized sport at the age of thirteen. Athletes state sport is no longer “fun.” This is understood by researchers to be child language for sport is dominated by excessively invested, abusive adults.

As extensively documented in *The Bullied Brain*, in the 21st century, non-invasive technology has allowed neuroscientists to confirm that abuse of all kinds does serious, long-lasting damage to brains. They have seen on brain scans that all forms of bullying and abuse---including those that do not touch the body---can and frequently do leave neurological scars on the brain that affect mental health and behavior in significant and lasting ways.

Perpetuating the cycle, harm to the brain manifests in aggression, violence, further bullying and abuse, school-shootings, and entry into the criminal justice system etc. Harm to the brain also manifests inwardly as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, self-harm including suicide etc.

Fully ignoring extensive research, abuse is normalized and entrenched in our society. Sport is a microcosm of society. The compounding crisis in Canadian sports, recently exposed as rife with normalized, endemic bullying and abuse, provides an opportunity for significant and widespread change in sport and in society. This is a powerful, historic opportunity that you have embraced.

Solutions

- 1. A Judicial Inquiry**
- 2. Criminalize Institutional Complicity**
- 3. Education**

Step One Judicial Inquiry

Like the Dubin Inquiry, a Judicial Inquiry into abuse in sport, and more importantly institutional complicity will identify the ways in which abuse:

- is not stopped
- is in fact enabled and perpetuated
- is covered up in a variety of ways that may involve government institutions, lawyers, payment of hush-money, NDAs, misappropriation of athlete development funds into payouts to victims, collusion with police, pressure on police, widespread failure in accountability and transparency
- depends on power imbalance
- requires athletes to be treated as if in the “out-group” that does not have the same safety, holistic selfhood, financial, psychological, physical or career security rights as others in organized sport
- indicates “athlete” is symbolic for “child, youth, young adult” whose lack of experience, knowledge, inherent dependence on adults---especially those entrusted and empowered to assess, create and deny opportunities, namely parents, teachers, and coaches---puts them at extreme risk that must be mitigated by stringent laws

- develops a broken system whereby perpetrators are protected and victims are re-victimized
- costs taxpayers billions in downstream, reactive damage-control from the fallout as is extensively documented in research (chronic illness, mental illness, substance abuse, violence, aggression, entry into criminal justice system, self-harm including suicide)

Step Two Criminalize Institutional Complicity

If directors and leaders in sport in Canada were held criminally accountable, the goal would be to use this step as a deterrent and a motivator for effective education for leaders and directors, coaches, parents, and especially athletes. The more athletes are educated about what constitutes a violation of their rights and integrity, the more they will report which in turn protects directors and leaders. Of course directors and leaders in education must be included.

The judicial inquiry is a necessary first step to measure the present broken system against a new system that holds individuals who enable abuse and are accomplices to abuse and actively cover up abuse criminally accountable. Namely:

- those who fail to act effectively on abuse reports
- those who fail to protect athletes
- those who fail to effectively educate athletes about abuse and their rights to train and compete in an abuse-free environment
- those who permit retaliation for speaking up
- those fail to protect whistleblowers
- those who use NDAs to silence whistleblowers, victims, etc.
- those who pay out hush-money to victims
- those who do not report immediately to the required authorities
- those who actively cover up abuse in their organization
- those who fail to alert others that an individual in their organization has been identified as abusive (in the literature this is referred to as “passing the trash” and has been widely used in Canadian institutions to cover-up abuse)

The judicial inquiry can be used to do a cost-benefit analysis each step of the way. Is it more economical to hold criminally accountable those who are enablers of abuse? They are a relatively small number, whereas the costs that result from rampant victimization and re-victimization as noted are extreme. The pressing question is as a nation can we continue to afford enabled abuse due to institutional complicity?

Considering the shocking rise in youth mental health issues, correlated with the data from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection that educator sex abuse is on the rise, the costs are only going to increase for downstream damage-control. This economic burden does not even factor in normalized and rampant social-relational, psychological, emotional, physical, verbal abuse (aka toxic masculinity, racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, anti-Semitism). Nor does it factor in emotional neglect. All of the above are devastating to brains and bodies and thus costly.

Step Three Education

A judicial inquiry acts as the blueprint for Canada and the world just as the Dubin Inquiry did. It establishes a path forward for healthy change. It allows us to exit the bullying and abuse paradigm and enter into a new safer, healthier framework that is brain-informed. A new “neuroparadigm.”

Our present system is outdated as it does not factor in how much damage is being done to child, youth, and young adult brains in Canada due to normalized, entrenched abuse in sport and everywhere else. There are decades of extensive research that documents all forms of bullying and abuse can physically harm the brain. The damage can be seen on brain scans. It is time with this knowledge that we educate adults and children about this scientific reality.

The brain learns by repetition at timed intervals. Teaching children about how to keep their brains safe and healthy must be taught as frequently as sport skills or academic skills. It needs to start in kindergarten and become weekly more sophisticated throughout the child’s development into adulthood. The brain is fully mature at 24 or 25 years of age.

Adults can learn quickly and efficiently that we have been operating with a “bill of false goods” to use Michael Merzenich’s term. He is internationally renowned and highly-awarded as the “Father of Neuroplasticity.” We adults have brain plasticity until our final days on the planet. While it’s far more intense for children, we too can change our brains. Our brains are innately wired to repair and restore.

This is a historic moment for us to enter as a nation into the 21st century and become the first country that operates in sports and everywhere else with an understanding that mental health is correlated with brain health. We must keep our brains safe from all forms of bullying and abuse. We owe it to our children to keep their brains healthy and safe.

It is a source of pride to be first in the world in a sport. We invest a great deal of time, resources, and infrastructure into this goal. Unfortunately for too many sport organizations in our country, they operate under the outdated myth that abuse is a necessary evil for greatness. There is no research to support this belief. In fact, high-performance is shown to be connected to healthy brains training in safe, supportive environments, *not* toxic ones.

Why doesn’t Canada strive to be first in the world in using up-to-date neuroscience to make child, youth, young adult brain health and safety paramount in sports and everywhere else?