

***“No Danger to the Public”:
Femicide, Multi-level Failures, and the Mass Casualty Event***

***Mass Casualty Commission
PHASE 2 Submission***

Feminists Fighting Femicide, in coalition with Persons Against Non-State Torture

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Introduction

“No danger to the public” is something police often say as soon as possible after a man kills his family or his female partners. To reassure “the public.”

But male violence against women is the greatest danger to the public there is. And it’s relentless. Yet we don’t talk about it. Because when men kill their families or associates it’s quickly proclaimed to be “no danger to the public.”

Prior to the mass casualty event, one of the most notorious murders in Nova Scotia, committed by Lionel Desmond, ending the lives of his mother, partner, and daughter, also apparently represented “no danger to the public”

<http://www.metronews.ca/news/halifax/2017/01/04/four-people-killed-in-nova-scotia-home-.html>

But women and girls are the public. And there is a big danger to us: abusive, controlling, misogynist, violent men with guns who first target us in families, and then beyond.

The mass casualty perpetrator targeted current and ex-female partners, and other women for threats, harassment, violence and death. The RCMP’s systemic patterns of failure to investigate and take timely action against violent men like him, in part comes from the mentality that the violence toward and killings of women partners are “private” matters that do not affect the entire community; that toxic masculine behaviours of arming oneself to the teeth, strangling one’s partner, threatening female neighbours, or sexually preying on the vulnerable around them, are nobody’s business.

On the other hand, patriarchy often demonizes resistant survivors and feminists as dangerously “out of control,” although women are much less likely than men to be violent. Most victims do not act out vengefully, and are far more concerned with community safety, and even the rapist’s well-being, than they are with revenge. Instead of finding support, though, non-violent women like Suzie Butlin, who contacted the RCMP a few “too many” times about her future murderer, are all too often threatened with charges themselves. Shamefully, this was the approach taken to Lisa Banfield as well- that she, a survivor of terroristic abuse, was somehow the problem.

Let’s contrast this with the way violent men consider it their right, and are supported in their entitlement, to act out their violent fantasies upon women and children: Pornography educates in how to best humiliate and dehumanize women; aggression is taught on the personal and national level as the way to solve problems; control and violence are just

being “masculine.” The women and children in men’s lives will usually bear this brunt, but so will random female targets, or war targets. The victims are also often the women and children whose bodies and images are commercially sexually exploited in porn and prostitution. They may be the women and children trapped in forced poverty, available and disposable for men like the mass casualty perpetrator. And when guns are added to the mix, femicide breathes very closely to all of us.

Yet institutions, societies and families go on normalizing male violence and femicide, and cast women as the true “dangers.” When women’s sexuality or autonomy is out of male control, then fathers, brothers, husbands and sons have long been invited to kill women, at various places and points in time on this planet: witch burnings, “honour” killings, or just because she “made him mad.” Men are regularly let off the hook for their violence, when their masculine fantasy of themselves is affronted by women who do something like set a boundary, say no, or exist. Male violence and femicide is often a response by men to feeling unsafe in their version of masculinity, one in which they get to enjoy total power and control.

Men commit far more violence than women. Women and girls are conditioned to be submissive to males, and less violent. This keeps male supremacy stable.

For males, faith in using violence is instead encouraged, such as in the many cinematic violent heroes, in the lionization of soldiering, in the murderer-as-victim trope. Male violence and femicide are approved and reinforced when men’s so-called “crimes of passion” are totally or partially excused because perhaps she left him, or married someone he didn’t like, or she made a joke about his penis, or because she didn’t have dinner on the table or because she wore the “wrong” clothes. Women who self-defend against abuse are often criminalized.

What this asymmetrical accountability for violence shows is that social conditioning and attitude make violence happen. It is very far from inevitable.

In Canadian Eurocentric society, safety is traditionally treated as an individual matter that is best solved by physical guarding by a dominant male. What if instead the community took responsibility for creating safety by building a foundation of power and respect for women? This has been shown by feminist anthropologists such as Peggy Sanday, to have the most powerful effect of all on reducing violence against women in societies¹. It does not involve heroic acts, big muscles, or death. It is simply a different attitude.

What if we gained faith that we could create safety in community by equity and power-sharing with women? Right now, we have all been processed by the propaganda machine that says safety resides in the arms race, looking out for number 1, and swift, violent

¹ **Societies of Peace: Matriarchies Past, Present, and Future.** Edited by Heide Goettner-Abendroth. Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, Inc., 2009. 450 pp.

responses to incursions. Or that safety resides in having armed members of a paramilitary organization, like the RCMP, policing us.

But clearer heads have identified again and again that the human societies that are the safest, the most peaceful, are those where women are respected as autonomous full human beings, as leaders, where power is truly shared. The Mik'maw cultural approach to shared leadership is a good example.

What if dominant groups let go of white privilege, colonial privilege, male privilege? When we let go of having to pump up our top-dog status, when we give up fighting for supremacy at all costs, when power and respect are really shared, a profound peace will dawn, a peace that was possible all along. This is the goal of many feminists.

And yet we face a conundrum: a significant portion of violent misogynists are not going to change in the short or medium term. And in the meantime, the women targeted by these men need safety. They are not going to get it from the unredeemably misogynist RCMP. Yet these femicidal men must be stopped, contained, monitored now, no matter how much faith we have in community justice and human social evolution for the long term.

This is the challenge facing this Commission, and anyone hoping to prevent femicides: addressing current threats to women's lives with existing resources, while helping to usher in for the future, a safer, more egalitarian, woman-positive society.

Feminists Fighting Femicide is an ad hoc coalition of feminists addressing this challenge. We formed in response to the mass casualty event, and the need for an inquiry. Collectively our membership holds many decades of experience as feminist anti-violence experts and advocates, and personal survivorship. Participating in the inquiry without counsel or compensation, we share our distilled expertise here, for the benefit of the Commission and for future feminists who may read this document.

The RCMP's systemic failure to address femicides and other violence against women

In Nova Scotia in April of 2020, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police failed to prevent a mass murder involving multiple femicides of community members and an attempted femicide of his current partner. They did not intervene in a meaningful way at much earlier possible intervention points, although the perpetrator had been terrifying his partner and other community members for many years. This failure is the predictable outcome of a long history of failure, with respect to addressing misogynist violence against women and girls. As the public has learned in recent years, the RCMP has its own culture of sexism and

bullying within its ranks. Expecting effective outcomes in this area from the RCMP has begun to feel naive, even for those who have been hopeful about reform.

The RCMP was created to violently enforce colonization and white supremacy. These are two of the root causes of femicide. The institution has not fundamentally evolved away from these roots. The Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) in their 2022 report “The Toxic Culture of the RCMP: Misogyny, Racism, and Violence against Women in Canada’s National Police Force”² states:

The evidence of systemic discrimination and violence against women perpetrated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is shocking, and it is growing. The RCMP’s culture of misogyny, racism and homophobia, identified by the Honourable Michel Bastarache in his report Broken Dreams, Broken Lives, affects not only the treatment of women who are employed by the RCMP, but also the treatment of the women whom the RCMP is intended to serve.

It is time for an external review and extensive restructuring or dismantling of a police force that is no longer a national symbol of pride, but a manifestation of Canada’s failure to uphold its human rights obligations to women.

Retired Justice Michel Bastarache directly states that the RCMP as an institution is systemically misogynist and homophobic:³

I have concluded...that the culture of the RCMP is toxic and tolerates misogyny and homophobia at all ranks and in all provinces and territories. This culture does not reflect the stated values of the RCMP, and it is found throughout the organization. RCMP members and officers are forced to accept that they must function in the context of this culture to succeed. RCMP employees appear to blame the “bad apples” without recognizing the systemic and internal origins of this conduct.

Comprehensive cultural change is required. For the last 30 years issues of workplace and sexual harassment and discrimination have been brought to the attention of the

² The report, by authors SHIVANGI MISRA, ASHLEY MAJOR, PAMELA PALMATER, AND SHELAGH DAY can be read and downloaded here:

<https://fafia-afai.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/FAFIA RCMP REPORT.pdf>

³ Michel Bastarache, Broken Dreams, Broken Lives: The Devastating Effects of Sexual Harassment on Women in the RCMP, Final Report on the Implementation of the Merlo Davidson Settlement Agreement (Ottawa: Merlo Davidson Settlement, November 11, 2020), <https://www.rcmpgrc.gc.ca/wam/media/4773/original/8032a32ad5dd014db5b135ce3753934d.pdf>.

Government of Canada and the RCMP through internal reports, external reports and litigation before the Courts. The measures taken in response have not, in my view, succeeded in addressing the underlying issues arising from the RCMP's toxic culture. Indeed, based on my review of former reports and litigation and conversations with 644 women, I am not convinced that positive cultural change can occur without external pressure. As such, I conclude that the time has come for an in depth, external and independent review of the organization and future of the RCMP as a federal policing organization.

Both these reports list a shameful drumbeat of past reports and reviews that led to the very same conclusions. Yet decades of Canadian and international criticism has not resulted in meaningful change at the RCMP, particularly for the treatment of Indigenous and rural women. Again and again, meaningful accountability and change has been avoided by the institution.

With respect to the mass casualty event, the RCMP failed to use a lens of understanding that would quickly associate the perpetrator's choices with misogynist revenge killings and femicide. Nor did they operate using best practices that should have been in place specifically to address an emergency involving a potential mass killer who was targeting his partner and other women and neighbours.

The RCMP historically and currently in their Nova Scotia activities to this day, have not assimilated an important reference point of contemporary understanding: that partner abusers who are violent coercive controllers are a danger to the community as a whole, and are potential femicidal mass killers. Instead, women's fears are often minimized and victims are directed to seek civil orders of protection using their own resources. A faulty general conceptualization of male violence against intimate partners as a "private" matter and a "limited" risk, may have been an additional roadblock to their alerting community members to danger in the hours of the mass casualty event.

Two recent Nova Scotia examples illuminate frustrations with the RCMP's ineffectiveness in addressing violence against women in Nova Scotia:

- The RCMP's failure to protect Suzie Butlin from murder by her femicidal neighbour.
- The treatment of victim advocates by the RCMP officers in charge of J Division's handling of the Sexual Assault Investigation Review Committee.

As the Butlin femicide is discussed in our final report, and in other resources for the Commission, we focus here on **the hidden but extremely frustrating experiences of feminist advocates seeking meaningful responses from the RCMP with respect to improving their services for women and girls.**

In 2020, the RCMP faced a severe problem: Investigative journalism vividly illustrated the RCMP's pattern of failure on sexual assault cases. Their high-profile response was to form a series of Sexual Assault Investigation Review Committees. This was in accord with best practices in policing with respect to violence against women, embraced by the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs, that support case reviews which are done collaboratively with community advocates

The RCMP invited community advocates to volunteer to participate in a committee schedule that promised many gruelling days of review of troubling and traumatic cases of reported sexual assault that did not result in charges. Such advocates, already underpaid, and whose work was vital to their similarly underpaid organizations, nevertheless cleared their schedules to accommodate the RCMP's request, hoping that something might change, at least in the outcomes of the cases under review. Cases previously deemed "unfounded" or abandoned for other sometimes sexist reasons, would get a second look, this time from diverse feminist experts on sexual violence.

An FFF member shares her personal experience on the RCMP's committee:

The agency I worked for had been asked by the RCMP to send a volunteer and that agency tapped me to attend.

On the first of many planned three-day 9-5 workshops, community advocates showed up at the RCMP headquarters in Dartmouth. We were asked to surrender our ID at the door as we entered a fancy building with an entry way that looked like an RCMP museum, with their iconic flag, uniforms and photos arranged in an expansive and powerful display. We were greeted by nothing more than ice water for the day, and by two fairly low-ranking members, one of whom was retired, neither with substantial experience of collaborative work with community on complex policy matters. In fact, another advocate worriedly whispered to me that the investigations by the committee coordinator, a retired sergeant and sexual assault investigator, had sometimes been problematic.

It quickly became clear that the RCMP members in charge were in way over their heads, and had a weak grasp of the federal terms of reference for their own project. They became flustered and irritated by questions posed by the many experienced professionals around the table. They tried to assert that the committee work was about reporting on broad-based themes rather than reopening actual cases. As most of us were in fact volunteering precious time in the hope of actually obtaining justice for victims whose cases had been wrongly closed, we insisted that the purpose of the project be clarified by its manager in Ottawa. She was reached by speakerphone as we all sat around the table, and the manager affirmed the advocates' understanding of the project. The officers looked embarrassed and irritated. As an experienced gender violence expert, I had led much of the questioning.

The next morning, committee members began to assemble again in the conference room at 9am, and the RCMP coordinator said she would like to speak to me. I said "OK" and assumed we would sit down and talk in some chairs near the entrance to the big conference room. Instead, she paced powerfully and rapidly toward a little door down the hall. I asked her where she was going, and without turning around or breaking her stride she called out, "Oh we're just going over here to this room."

She approached the door of what was a tiny and sparsely furnished RCMP interview room. I asked her what this was about and she turned around at that point and said, "You'll see when we're in there." I said I was not okay with that and repeated my question asking what this was about, and she repeated that same answer. At that point I noticed the other officer, a corporal, apparently waiting there. The corporal did not say hello, but instead was already angry, grimacing with a hot red face, and said loudly, "We'll do this in here, or not at all!"

I said, "OK" and turned around and walked back to the committee in the large conference room.

I recognized this sort of police behaviour- isolate, intimidate, control by trying to get me alone in their environment. I knew it was important to stop the isolating so I immediately told the whole group what had just happened. At that point, the corporal entered the large conference room, still bright red in the face and fuming. She angrily and loudly spoke out to me. I asked her, "Am I under arrest?" I was not just being cute- I was genuinely confused about where these tactics were going. She huffed and puffed as she moved toward the front of the room. I took my seat.

The coordinating sergeant then entered the room and stepped to the head of the table. She complained loudly about how I had bullied her the day before. A Native participant suggested some healing practices to return to harmony. Instead, the officers again wanted to "talk to me" outside the committee room. I asked if it might be better to do this after lunch, but the officers insisted on talking immediately. KR, a long- time community colleague, seeing the intimidation factor, volunteered to join me. KR and I waited outside the conference room.

Unbeknownst to us, while we waited outside the door, the retired sergeant and corporal announced to the room that I would be "leaving the committee." The group then broke for lunch, and the RCMP officers came out and joined KR and myself. They suggested going back in to the conference room. The corporal then reached around to put her hand on my shoulder, like she was pushing me

into a squad car, and I told her “Do not touch me.” Steaming again, she nearly shouted “That’s it! Collect your things and leave!” Both officers started speaking loudly and I told them I could hear them well enough. KR and I tried to introduce the idea of ground rules for discussions, that could make everyone more comfortable. This went nowhere. The RCMP project coordinator then peered at me intently, saying “You need to realize that every action has a consequence.” She told me I should think about a career change and told me to pack up my things and leave the building. I did so, and as I left, I heard the officers grumbling behind me about missing their lunch.

Because I had taken the bus and it was now heavily snowing, KR offered to drive me home, and I was so grateful, as we walked together down the long stairs and corridors. As we left, I felt lucky to get my ID back from the desk officer. After KR and I got in her car, an animal cry welled up in me, a spit-tears-and-snot-all-over-the-dashboard kind of sobbing. I knew that KR, another long-time veteran of dealing with the RCMP, fully understood. That I wailed for the dismissed victims who would never know justice, I sobbed for the stupidity of white women like myself who could believe again and again that maybe this time the RCMP would be different; I was ugly crying for the little girl who had been fighting back for so long, only to be betrayed by other women such as these officers.

Later after talking to a national counterpart, we learned that she suspected the RCMP in these committees across the regions, were intentionally attacking and isolating the strongest advocates on each committee, as an example meant to chill the others.

* * *

Just days after that, COVID shut-downs began, and the entire committee process was eclipsed, the RCMP skating away once again from accountability.

This is only one example of many over the course of our collective personal and professional experience, of individual and institutional indifference or hostility to improving responses to violence against women on the part of the RCMP.

For action:

The RCMP has failed as a responder to community or societal needs for violence prevention, and is resistant to change. Planning for violence prevention instead should emphasize changing community power balances to provide equality to women. This means women’s equal access to economic resources, housing, education, status and respect, especially for Indigenous and Black women in Nova Scotia. It means empowering advocates and bystanders to create community norms that support safety.

Even with community strategies in place, a percentage of perpetrators of hate crimes, including those against women, will only be made safe by containment. Therefore a law enforcement response remains very relevant. Public accountability mechanisms should be in place regarding law enforcement's responses to misogynist violence. These mechanisms and standards should be created by community and informed by expertise in violence against women. These measures should be transparent, easily monitored by the public, and be part of any provincial contracting with the RCMP. Failures to meet minimum standards should result in the activation of contractual penalties for the RCMP, as well as firings, fines and demotions for those responsible within the RCMP.

Even as red flags were reported or otherwise became known to RCMP in relation to the perpetrator, both formally and informally, they were again and again ignored or minimized. The systemic misogyny, white supremacy and racism within the RCMP must be examined as a factor in minimization of the dangers ascribed to the mass casualty perpetrator, in the years before, as well as during the mass casualty event.

Finally, as participants in the Commission process, we note that it can feel dangerous on a gut level to challenge the RCMP and bring to light our own negative experiences and those of the women we serve as advocates. Whistleblower and advocate protections must be made explicit in whistleblower laws, and in the conduct of all consultative processes with respect to patriarchal violence and the RCMP. Whistleblower and advocacy protections should be made law for all speaking out about direct experience of discrimination and misogynist victimization.

Strangulation

One of the attacks most strongly correlated with potential murder is strangulation. It is included as a key red flag in most risk assessments that measure whether an abuser will turn murderous. It is considered an aggravating factor in the criminal law regarding assault in various jurisdictions.

Strangulation is a gendered behaviour: It is most often enacted by dangerous, controlling men against women and girls. It is one of the main methods used by men to kill women in relationships. Sadly, its risks are nevertheless downplayed, and the behaviour minimized, both by bystanders and by professionals.

It can cause death in minutes; it can scar the brain in seconds. Repeated strangulations have cumulative effects on targets, effects both physical and mental. It is meant to silence and control the women who survive it. With it, violent men say: "I have the power of life and death over you; I can snuff out your breath and your voice and your very existence, at will."

This is an extremely powerful truth that abusers are demonstrating to their target. To have been choked, even once, is to live thereafter in the shadow of death.

From an FFF member:

By the time I was 29, I was a survivor of strangulations by three different men. This is not unusual. The most recent one was enacted by my then-husband, because he was losing control of me in the relationship. Enraged and drunk, he broke down a locked door, tearing out the wooden doorframe, and instantly had his hands squeezed around my neck. I had been sleeping in bed. I felt a cool seriousness, recognizing my life was in danger and calculating I had no chance of throwing off his 6 foot 200 pound frame pinning down my small body as he choked me. In that split second, I decided I would feign loss of consciousness in the hope that it would give him pause and he would stop. He did not do so immediately, but then did after a few more seconds of ragefully squeezing my throat, and left the room. I ran out a side door of the house, running in my bare feet down a dark country road in a Nova Scotia January, running for my life just like in that Beatles song "Run for your life if you can little girl." The next day, and for the following week, bruises around my neck were tender and my voice was not normal. The bottoms of my feet were painful, hurt by stones as I ran the quarter mile to the closest neighbour's house.

At that time I was a post-graduate degree holder, with a bright future. A future that was nearly ended by male violence, narrowly escaping the death or brain damage that might have resulted if the strangling went on just a few moments more.

I was lucky: I made an educated guess that he would not pursue me with post-separation abuse if I left him. And that turned out to be correct. Not all women are so fortunate, and many abusive men make good on their threats after their target leaves the relationship. Each woman targeted for severe abuses like strangulation must make her own grim calculation, her own life-or-death best guess.

After each of the strangulations I survived, the perpetrators' lives continued pretty much without any consequence or interruption. My last brush with a violent death sank beneath the waves as an event. It literally did not cross my mind to report him to police, because on some gut level the behaviour was normalized for me, my first strangler having been my father at ages 10 and 21. Also I mainly wanted to get away from my ex-partner, not be involved in a drawn-out justice process that could bind me to him for 3 years or more. Mutual friends continued to hang out with my ex as if nothing had happened, although I was not silent about it. He did not receive any feedback from anyone, except for losing me. In no way did his life or status change, in the least.

* * *

With respect to the events that are the subject of this Commission's inquiry, the killer's strangulation of his partner stands out as what could have been a turning point. It was

witnessed by others, it was reported to RCMP by a third party, it was known and spoken about. In a healthy society, this would elicit a robust response. Instead, potential witnesses to be interviewed became a few doodles in the margins; no investigation, no increased scrutiny of the strangler ensued. The neighbouring couple who were concerned about Lisa decided for their own safety to permanently relocate. But in the aftermath of strangling someone, the killer's life and trajectory continued with no interruption.

How different would our lives be if we lived in a society where strangulation is responded to swiftly and strongly, on the same level as say, an armed bank robbery? Where any strangulation is understood to mean that someone's life is in danger, and strong interventions are needed to create safety. How different would things be if strangulation were seen as a threat not only to one individual but also to the fabric of society.

The ripple effects of systemically ignoring strangulation will be felt for many years to come in Nova Scotia.

For action:

Nova Scotia should develop and enact a law enforcement protocol that details a robust, urgent, best practices response to any report of strangulation, with strong accountability measures for law enforcement professionals built in.

Public education and community development respecting the danger, meaning and impacts of strangulation should be carried out across Nova Scotia. Counteracting the minimization and normalization of this form of violence, understanding its role as a gendered hate crime of coercive control.

Communities should be supported to develop bystander action plans to stop violence, and create safety for targets., that would be triggered by any strangulation.

Professional education for decision makers and service providers with respect to understanding and responding to strangulation should be mandatory, in addition to law enforcement, in the justice, health, community services and educational systems. Professionals participating should include (but not be limited to) judges, public prosecutors, law enforcement, child protection, and emergency medical personnel.

Professional sectors (in addition to law enforcement) responding to strangulation should have best practices protocols that they can use to recognize and address needs in the aftermath of strangulation. This should include updated understanding of the link between strangulation and traumatic brain injury, and strangulation and coercive control.

Feminist organizations have been undermined and can't make change alone

Feminists trying to support women facing danger, and trying to create better system responses, have been undermined in Nova Scotia.

In the 1990's the federal government largely shifted from providing operational funding directly earmarked to feminist anti-violence organizations to block grants to the provinces for social services. This meant that feminist organizations which were often critics of provincial administration of justice and social services, were now much more under provincial control. For example, those working in association with Avalon Centre in the early 2000's for example, recall direct silencing attempts from a provincial deputy minister, engaging with their board to attempt to shut down the executive director's justice system criticism. Similarly, the transition houses were attacked and subject to attempted closures and new service provision mandates, which undermined the freedom to advocate and hold systems accountable from a feminist perspective. Funding was used by the province to undermine solidarity, by setting feminist groups into competition with one another, making them less effective change agents. One of the results was the increasing loss of outspoken leadership highlighting and demanding change to institutional responses such as the RCMP's. This was replaced by more orientation towards "service provision" and bureaucratic compliance.

An FFF member speaks about this period:

There are many times we did not have the woman power, resources, and time to articulate and advocate for structural systemic policies that were harming women and children... I, like many feminists, could not find the time to come together and develop a critical feminist analysis...

It was only in getting away from the daily grind of administering sex-based services for women that I had the time to question, process, and read analysis by other feminists. But what were the options for feminists like me?

In this climate, it became almost impossible to hold institutions like the RCMP accountable for their systemic under-responses to violence against women. The result is their failure in Nova Scotia to serve and protect women and girls meaningfully, free from much publicity or consequences. Although many advocates and survivors continued to do their best, the anemic resourcing kept them running on empty. The provincial (and federal under the Harper government) disapprobation of advocacy simply did not permit the kind of dogged, long-term policy work and advocacy that is needed to raise the standard of institutional responses to violence against women.

Here are some composite sketches drawn from actual experiences of the last few years, to help readers understand what it's like to be an advocate who can see the femicides looming, and yet be unable to take the steps necessary for safety or change (which is a

recipe for trauma and burnout for feminist anti-violence workers).

We ask you to put yourself in the place of these workers:

When a woman is afraid of her neighbour who is taking potshots at her property and making threats, you will not be able to get any officers to do anything further, because they already “talked” to him. You will go to bed and beg the universe that this will not be another Suzie Butlin. You will not be able to do anything more than hand her the transition house contact info and hope they can help her even though this is not partner violence. You will not be able to advocate any further and you will not be able to even follow up to check on her, because there are too many victims coming through the door each day.

When you call a police officer to ask for help around safe custody exchanges and he asks you why and you say “because of the history of abuse and coercive control”, and he asks you “What is coercive control?” you will not have time to educate him properly about the core knowledge he should already have for his job and he will deny her request for an exchange to happen in the police parking lot. You will not know how to tell this to the mother involved, and you will not know what to do next.

When a woman is trying to make a decision about reporting or not reporting violence you will not be able to tell her in good conscience that you know whether or not she will actually receive help from the police, the prosecutors, child protection or the judges. You will not be able to tell her whether the system will harm her instead, or if you know whether or not she will be accused of lying by any of the multiple players in the system. You will not be able to assure her that reporting will mean she will have safety. You will not be able to connect to provincial leadership to do anything about the uncertain, inconsistent, and sometimes harmful responses because you do not have the time and that is no longer part of your job since a feminist model was replaced with a bureaucratic one at your organization.

When the abusive ex-partner of a woman uses law enforcement to “SWAT” her home, falsely claiming she is not following her custody agreement, and asks them to “rescue” his kids and 11 officers show up with lights blazing and sirens screaming, terrifying her and her children, you will not be able to rely on the supposedly specialized domestic violence officer to help you anymore, because he was involved in this response. You will not be able to advocate on this matter to his supervisors as you will now have to use all your time to address the trauma caused to the woman and her children by the SWAT-ing.

When the prosecutor repeatedly suggests to the woman who reported her partner’s threats to the police to seek a civil protection order instead of bringing a criminal case forward, you will cry with her in frustration because even after the mass killing and arsons of April 2020, her partner’s threats to kill her and “burn her house down” will still be treated like a private matter, of no consequence to the community. You will not have time to help her challenge this, because you are dealing with her suicidality now, and because the file has now gone to another prosecutor and the survivor doesn’t even know who that is.

When there is no stable funding for sexual violence counselling, and your contract is getting renewed again and again in 3 month intervals, this will mean you have to explain to your clients that you might not be there for them anymore, over and over again. This will leave you both wrung out. You will decide to quit because you can't take it anymore and are burning out. You will let your clients know one last time that you can't be there for them anymore, you will try to connect them to alternative services if there are any, and still one of your teen clients who is being retraumatized by the justice system will kill herself a few months later. You will know it wasn't your fault but you will keep getting intrusive flashes that tell you her death really was your fault. You will not be able to afford your own vicarious trauma treatment because of the low wages paid to non-profit employees.

When the family courts refuse your organization's offer of training around how abusers use the family court system to maintain coercive control and torture their targets, you will not have the time or energy to keep pushing. You will not understand that because you used the word "training" it insulted the judges who only receive "judicial education." You will have to sit with women again and again as they go to family courts with these very educated judges who force them to hand over children to dangerous abusers. You will not be able to advocate for legislative changes to the law that would direct judges to understand that partner violence affects parenting and endangers children because you are pushed to "provide services" rather than make change.

You will not have time, support or a movement to hold the systems accountable. You will barely have time to pray.

Focus for action:

Community accountability and transparency for institutions responsible for women's safety must be established and properly funded. Feminist workers must be forefronted in leading accountability.

Misogynist violence must be viewed as hate crimes on the basis of sex, rather than downplayed in its gendered aspects or normalized. This would reframe more accurately femicide and other misogynistic violence as the enforcement of racist and sexist dominance, rather than as unpredictable "aberrations".

The legislative recognition of women-hating offences such as coercive control and non-state torture in the Criminal Code is needed as a conceptual base for the society to begin to address femicide.

The federal government should reinstitute permanent operational funding to provincial feminist organizations for research, policy and advocacy work with respect to the RCMP and the justice system as a whole, with the ultimate goal of eliminating hate crimes against women including femicide.

Feminist voices and analysis must be valued and supported in specifically-targeted femicide prevention through permanent funding of provincial and local anti-femicide research, observatories and advocacy.

Start censoring sex buyers and exploiters. Stop normalizing human rights violations as "sex work"

There are hidden stories, and some evidence offered about the mass casualty perpetrator as a sex buyer and a sexual exploiter. In particular, the material submitted by the Avalon Centre highlights how the perpetrator was known as a sexual exploiter. This makes political understanding of the sex trade and male sex buying/commercial exploitation relevant to this inquiry.

Feminists Fighting Femicide knows sex buying to be a form of dehumanization, and a human rights violation. It is a dehumanization enacted by buyers who either do not see their targets as humans with feelings, or do not care and ignore them as humans, or who derive pleasure from controlling and intimately violating their bodies.

Dehumanizing via sex buying follows the pattern of oppressions and power imbalances in societies. The commodification and consumption of the sexualized bodies of mainly Indigenous, Black and brown women and girls is a deliberate tactic and outcome of European enslaving and colonizing. State actions still currently perpetuate it by systematically depriving women and girls of safety and of independent economic survival, and by failing to censure the largely white and moneyed sex buyers.

Male sex buying of female bodies reflects and reinforces the social, economic and legal dominance of one sex class over another in a society. Sex-buying men conceive of and violate women and girls as non-humans who can be bought and sold. Their dehumanizing attitudes are on full display nowadays via the internet, on sex buyer online ratings forums, for example⁴.

The larger society in Canada mostly turns a blind eye to this extreme dehumanization, or tries to normalize it as "sex work." Both these approaches, ignoring or normalizing, reinforce sex buyers' colonizing, sexist and racist entitlement. These approaches minimize the wanton degradation of targeted human beings through sex trade commodification. Ignoring or normalizing sex buyers' dehumanization weakens the targeted women and girls, it weakens families and communities, and the ability of people to fight against white capitalist eco-cidal patriarchy.

⁴ www.the-invisible-men.tumblr.com

Instead feminist analysts since at least the 1970's, and including Feminists Fighting Femicide, clearly see sex buying and commercial sexual exploitation as violence that is part of the continuum of dehumanizing violences that lead to rampant femicide and destruction of the planet. This continuum of violences and dehumanizations transmit the message that women asserting their full humanity may be met with death. This threat underpins and stabilizes the overall oppression of women and girls as a class. If men have the power to buy and sell the bodies of women and girls, that is threat and a message to all of us: "you are meat to be consumed by a white male-dominated political structure and economy. If you challenge this you may be killed." Many of us are killed, or harmed beyond recovery.

Elite women often have sought safety by seeking to differentiate themselves from the women and girls who are the targets of sex buying, and thereby reinforce the validity of the existence of a class of people whose bodies may be bought and sold for sexual or other purposes. Academics and profiteers promoting the sex trade for their own reasons, have popularized the concept of "sex work", and sought to normalize these transactions, viewing "stigma" rather than the inherent dehumanization by sex buyers, as the main problem.

But Nova Scotia survivors of the sex trade know better. One friend of Feminists Fighting Femicide contributed the following for inclusion here, a plea not to employ the normalizing term "sex work" in the writings of the Commissioners:

Today I write to you with respect for this inquiry.

The man responsible had I believe a profound anger directed towards women. Specifically women who find themselves in vulnerable situations in their lives. I strongly believe GW involvement in the sex trade.

For almost ten years I sold my body to men for sex, too many men to count - much like this man. Men who think women are nothing more than objects. To feed their own selfish sexual gratification. This is all I was.

When I was in my early twenties I would wake each day and would try to play the ultimate mind fuck with myself. I would sit in front of a mirror fresh faced and sit and transform myself from one person to another staring back trying to achieve a look of what men, like this man, wanted me to be.

I was bought and sold from various cities in Canada - Sydney, Halifax, Thunder Bay , Vancouver, Kelowna and in between. New York , Washington and California. I had a fake name and identity to use to avoid and trick anyone looking for me. By this time I knew what I was doing was extremely part of organized crime - this wasn't "work." This was not a profession - and very far from the ideal of the glamorous world of Pretty Woman or any porn movie you assume.

When I hear the term used to describe what I did as “work “or “sex work” -it’s hurtful. It’s minimizing what I and so many other women like me had to endure behind closed doors. Calling it as such downplays what we had to go through everyday just to survive. Survive. Thats harsh reality that no one talks about.

Even hearing how his partner fled brought back memories for me.

Nova Scotia is the breeding ground for men who are willing to exploit their own. This I know. And it does not stop.

It took me a while to come to terms with figuring out the years of abuse and trauma on my body and my mind. It takes many years much like anyone who’s suffered the hands of a domestic violence abuser times that by one thousand.

We throw around the words “sex work” like we choose this as some profession. No child dreams of this and no parent wishes this as a job for their child. I cannot say that I was proud of what I was doing. This all stemmed of lack of choices at the time. When are we going to hold these men accountable on their choice to come at our women? Prey on them, degrade them - while no one helps them because they view it as some strange “job.”

If buying sex is illegal then why are men like him not responsible for paying to rape women? Why are they given a free pass? Did the RCMP or police turn a blind eye? Was it ok for him to harm women the way he did? These questions should be asked.

When all that make up, clothes come off as I scrubbed off the several men who touched me on any given night, all I was left with was the only option: to numb myself to sleep. There is nothing left but darkness. You detach yourself. You are forever haunted. Until you are in it and wanting out, you will never fully understand.

Calling it “work“ normalizes it only for you. Not the times where men flew into violent rages because services were not rendered. The times I was gang raped while no one stopped it. The times where I drugged men just to make it stop. Police and outreach could see the harm in my eyes. I’ve lost track of how many times I never knew if I would die by the hands of a pimp, madame or manager of a licenced establishment because I was their product for sale.

I was exploited under the assumption if I said no - no one who help me. And we see this time and time again. Especially for victims who want to break free, come forward - only to be labeled as “sex workers”.

This needs to stop. This is not a profession no matter what way you try to assume it is.

For those who label it as such ask yourself- does your job leaves you with years of sexual trauma on your body that you cannot fathom? Probably not.

Using the term “sex work” as if it was an adequate and appropriate term for what takes place in strip clubs, on porn sets and in brothels, hides what it really is. A degrading rape on women and children.

* * *

The transnational BIPOC feminist organization Af3irm has published the following statements (originally from Af3irm Hawaii, edited and excerpted here for brevity; please see <https://af3irm.org/af3irm/2019/08/decolonize-your-sex-work-stance-an-open-letter-to-2020-candidates/> for the full statement):

...We know too well that when the purchase of sex is protected and the demand for paid sex rises, it is we who become targets of sexual exploitation because we are the easiest, cheapest “supply.”

*To support prostitution is to support racism. We recognize that while prostitution may be empowering for some, it is not for others. We must remember that throughout history, prostitution has been used to legitimize sexual violence against us by white men. Centuries of colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy have helped normalize the notion of our bodies as property for male profit and pleasure. This legacy continues until today. When we are raped, exploited, and victimized, we and our sisters are dismissed as “prostitutes” and often criminalized for our own victimization. **The purchase of sex must be understood against the backdrop of our nation’s history of racialized and gendered violence.***

...Thanks to colonization, many generations of women and gender and sexual minorities have been denied the right of refusal to unwanted sex....We seek a future of self-determination where all people have genuine bodily autonomy. Prostitution is antithetical to that future.

In Canada, our criminal law has recognized some of these points already: sex buying is inherently dehumanizing, and causes social harms. Those whose bodies are sold should be decriminalized, while buyers and profiteers should be held accountable. The preamble of 2014’s Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act is worth noting for its commitment to viewing sex buying and trading as a human rights and equality violation and as a necessary step in preventing larger scale violence and social oppressions (excerpted here: read the full preamble at https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/annualstatutes/2014_25/page-1.html) :

...the Parliament of Canada has grave concerns about the exploitation that is inherent in prostitution and the risks of violence posed to those who engage in it;

...the Parliament of Canada recognizes the social harm caused by the objectification of the human body and the commodification of sexual activity;

...it is important to protect human dignity and the equality of all Canadians by discouraging prostitution, which has a disproportionate impact on women and children;

...it is important to denounce and prohibit the purchase of sexual services because it creates a demand for prostitution;

...it is important to continue to denounce and prohibit the procurement of persons for the purpose of prostitution and the development of economic interests in the exploitation of the prostitution of others as well as the commercialization and institutionalization of prostitution;

It is difficult to know the full extent of the mass casualty perpetrator's sex buying and sexually exploitive conduct. However, enough is known to call for an exploration of the intersection of sex buying and commercial sexual exploitation, and femicides, including mass killings.

Research has shown that the mentality of sex buyers often has much in common with that of convicted sex offenders: it is often sexist, misogynist, supportive of a violent and dominant masculinity, entitled and narcissistically self-focused, and dehumanizing toward their targets⁵

Sex-buying thus becomes an important point for potential intervention to prevent progression toward further violence, including femicide. This valuable intervention point will be missed if we normalize or ignore sex-buying.

Unfortunately, this ignoring is the current situation in Nova Scotia- the vast majority of sex buyers do not face even minor accountability, such as receiving tickets. Justice professionals, as well as some academics and social workers, minimize, normalize and ignore. Communities are left begging for assistance with buyers who are targeting BIPOC women and girls, targeting minors, and targeting those with disabilities such as addiction.

By ignoring sex buying in Nova Scotia, opportunities to make perpetrators shift course away from the ultimate dehumanization, femicide, are lost.

For action:

Stop using the "sex work" terminology: it does nothing to increase safety or the understanding of human rights violations of women, including the ultimate violation that is femicide. Adopting the chosen terminology of sex trade normalizers and promoters is inconsistent with the nuanced and equality-oriented feminist lens with which the

⁵ Jabbour, 2014 "EXPLORING THE DEMAND FOR PROSTITUTION: What Male Buyers Say About Their Motives, Practices, and Perceptions" <https://kafa.org.lb/sites/default/files/2019-01/PRpdf-69-635469857409407867.pdf>

Commission must analyze the violent dehumanization of women that leads to mass femicidal events. We request the Commission not use this term.

Nova Scotia should immediately enact coordinated community-based responses to sex-buyers. This should include ticketing and public identification of these men, eliminating sex-buyers' access to guns and other weapons, and community accountability measures.

Part of our provincial response to sex buyers should be their being professionally assessed for risks of femicide, other sex offences and other hate crimes, and they should be assigned appropriate interventions.

The interconnection of femicide and sex-buying should be transparently explored.

Universal basic income should be considered at the federal and provincial levels, in particular for its positive impact on women's ability to exit positions of gross inequality such as found in the sex trade, or in situations of domestic abuse.

We feel it is unfortunate that those asked to produce for the Commission an expert report on the sex trade do not represent a balance of views, and are not grounded in the data which supports the current Canadian equality model in response to prostitution rather than the sex trade's preferred model of decriminalizing buyers and profiteers. Academics who have promoted their agenda of the normalization of the sex trade over decades, such as at least one of the authors of the Commission's contracted report, should have been balanced by reports from experts in the Nordic, or equality, model, which decriminalizes and supports those who are prostituted, but sanctions buyers and profiteers.

The scapegoating of survivors, and the injustice to Lisa Banfield

At the end of World War II, the few Polish Jews that survived the Nazi death camps and forced marches, straggled back to their home villages. Upon arrival, often half-dead, they were not welcomed with rejoicing or open arms- many were subjected to more violence from their Polish neighbours. They were beaten and killed, so that Poles could keep the homes and property that they had stolen from them during the war, and so that Poles could act out their rage and post-war tensions on Jews, as they had for centuries. Polish police and soldiers were responsible for enacting much of the post-war violence against Jews.

We do not make Holocaust analogies lightly. But this is what comes to mind when thinking of the scapegoating of Lisa Banfield.

One can imagine her surreal flight into the woods after escaping from bondage. One can see her bravery and desperation, as she freed herself from certain death. One sees her managing to escape the armed murderer and the raging conflagration he set, that he hoped would reduce her to charred ashes in the crematorium of his garage. Spending the night in

the woods as he hunted, every sound could have meant death was near, every bit of light from the fires could have revealed her hiding place.

But Ms. Banfield's survival was not treated widely with rejoicing. She was immediately the target of suspicion, rage and blame.

The worst of this scapegoating was the RCMP's charging her with criminal offences. RCMP leadership has shown itself throughout the post-mass casualty ordeal, to be extremely dedicated to protecting its image, and to controlling against blame. In the context of their historically misogynistic attitude and self-serving behaviour as an institution, it is easy to view their charging of Ms. Banfield as a cynical way to deflect attention from their own failings. Despite their enormous resources, they abysmally failed to prevent extreme violence. Did the RCMP charge Lisa Banfield as an attempt to re-direct the anger and pain of Nova Scotians, toward someone other than the RCMP?

In addition to this, serious questions have been raised about RCMP rights violations by building their case against her even as she fully and generously cooperated with them in piecing together the mass casualty event. This betrayal of a survivor was not only a potential rights violation of Ms. Banfield, but a chilling reminder that the RCMP cannot be trusted to support survivors even in the most desperate of circumstances. There is no question these choices by the RCMP have registered with Nova Scotians who are right now living under coercive control of a partner, and has reduced their expectations of support and safety should they escape and survive. These choices by the RCMP, to charge and to sneakily investigate Ms. Banfield, has likely stopped Nova Scotians in their tracks who were contemplating reporting, escaping and surviving coercive controllers and torturers.

Other contributors to this inquiry will no doubt make the obvious points known by all experts in partner abuse: that victims of coercive control and torture are not responsible for their tormentors' acts of violence. That when told to do something by a vicious abuser, such victims have to weigh carefully whether their own life is at stake if they refuse. Reporting such abusers is a terrifying roll of the dice: will it help or harm my ability to survive? Simply leaving such abusers does not create safety: this was cruelly demonstrated by the perpetrator's methodical stalking and killing of women who challenged, refused or left him. The terrible risks of non-compliance are very real. Every deviation one makes from what the abuser wants, means a life and death calculation. At a certain point, one's will, cognition, and ability to refuse are destroyed by the abuse. Women describe their experience eventually as that of hollowed-out robots. To charge such a survivor in the aftermath of a mass killing, who easily might have died like other women he targeted, shows a complete incomprehension of what human survival demands in the face of coercive control and torture.

Female accused in Canada often plead guilty in these circumstances, even when they have very good defences such as duress or self-defence. The reasons include fear of more misogyny or racism in the legal system, lack of access to assertive counsel, and the need to

simply conclude things quickly in order to gain distance from the abuser and try to reclaim the remainder of their lives. It is wrong to charge women in these situations, at all. It is a complete reversal of sense to send them to hastily concocted “restorative” justice, as if they must make amends to community for the crime of being tortured. Instead, it is the justice system which should be making reparations for its ongoing failure to safeguard women in this province from femicide.

The holocaust against women is not happening in huge death camps; it is happening in one house, one hotel, one cottage at a time. Lisa Banfield is a survivor of that holocaust, deserving of our respect and support.