

February 5, 2014

Speaking Notes from Lana Wells for the House of Commons Special Committee on Violence Against Women, Ottawa, Canada

Thank you Madam Chair and committee members for inviting me here today.

As stated, I am currently the Brenda Strafford Chair in the Prevention of Domestic Violence in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary where I am also leading an initiative called Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence. For the past four and a half years our research focus has been on identifying, designing and implementing *primary* prevention strategies – that is trying to *stop the violence before it starts*.

In preparation for today, I reviewed many of your past meetings and was struck by the amount of research that you've already been presented with regarding the prevalence and root causes of violence against women. Today, I am going to focus my presentation on *ten* commitments that the Government of Canada can make that will prevent violence against women.

Number 1: The Government of Canada must develop, implement and evaluate a National Action Plan to address Violence Against Women and Children in partnership with provincial and territorial governments. The plan needs to focus on primary prevention strategies, using a lifespan approach. And most importantly, it can't be created in isolation. It needs to be developed in partnership with key research centres, the private sector and civil society. This plan must also be customized to meet the unique risk and protective factors associated with different populations like the Aboriginal, LGBTQ, and Immigrant/refugee communities.

Number 2: Invest in a National Child Care Strategy, one that is based on the principles of affordability, accessibility, and high quality care. This national strategy would support healthy childhood development *and* improve opportunities for women who wish to go back to the workforce, or get out of unhealthy or abusive relationships.

Number 3: Invest in the prevention of child maltreatment. Children who are abused...often grow up to become abusers. We can prevent physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect by doing the following:

- First, ***implement a Guaranteed Income Supplement*** to low-income families with children. We know that increasing household income lowers the risk of child maltreatment.¹

¹ In the first longitudinal study of its kind, Cancian, Yang, and Slack (2013) found that small amounts of additional household income lowered the risk of child maltreatment. This groundbreaking finding supports the hypothesis that income has a causal relationship to risk of child maltreatment.

- Second, ***prohibit corporal punishment*** by repealing Section 43 in the Criminal Code. Research shows that corporal punishment has detrimental effects on children and is associated with later violence perpetration².
- Third, ***prevent young parenting and unplanned pregnancies***. Young parents-and-parents of unplanned children are more likely to abuse their children³. Therefore, the Government of Canada needs to consider universal access to sexual health education, starting in grade 4; *no-cost* birth control; and universal access to abortion. Health Canada should immediately approve the medical-abortion drug mifepristone.
- Fourth, an effective way to prevent child maltreatment is to ***invest in a national parenting strategy***, to build the capacity and skills of all parents, including an investment in programs targeted to those at risk. Some examples include the Triple P Positive Parenting Program, the Strengthening Families Program, the Incredible Years Program, and the Nurse Family Partnership.

Number 4: Invest in a national housing strategy so that women do not have to choose between being in an abusive relationship and being homeless. I echo the recommendations from the YWCA of Canada with respect to the HOUSING FIRST⁴ strategy *and add* that increasing funds for short-term transitional housing is critical in stopping violence against women.

Number 5: Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to engage men and boys as allies, partners and violence disrupters to end violence against women. We have been researching this area for quite some time and have identified five key leverage areas:

- The first is to support men’s mental health and emotional well-being.
- The second is to leverage sports, recreation and workplace settings to influence healthy norms and behaviours (I know that the Status of Women has already started to invest in some of these types of initiatives throughout Canada.)
- The third is to support healthy male peer relationships and networks.
- The fourth is to support men to heal from past trauma. *And*
- The fifth is to build and promote positive fatherhood⁵.

This last point, building and promoting positive fatherhood is especially important, as fathers are assuming a greater role in childrearing. Studies indicate that fathers are just

² Cooper, M. and Wells, L. 2014. *Preventing child maltreatment: A critical strategy for stopping intimate partner violence in the next generation*. Available at: <http://preventdomesticviolence.ca/research/preventing-child-maltreatment-in-Alberta>

³ Ibid.

⁴ YWCA of Canada (2013) Housing First, Women Second? Available online at: <http://ywcacanada.ca/data/publications/00000066.pdf>

⁵ Cooper, M., Wells, L., & Dozois, E. (2013). *Promoting positive father involvement: a strategy to prevent intimate partner violence in the next generation*. Retrieved from <http://preventdomesticviolence.ca/research/promoting-positive-father-involvement-strategy-prevent-intimate-partner-violence>

as important as mothers to children's development⁶. We are now learning about the best kinds of programming and supports to help young men and at risk dads be good fathers. The Caring Dads program developed by Dr. Katreena Scott and the Supporting Father Involvement program developed by Dr. Kyle and Marsha Pruett are just two promising and best practices⁷. Currently, in Calgary, we are testing two promising programs (the Minnesota Early Learning Design (MELD) MELD and the Young Parenthood Program) with partners who serve teen mothers, and we will know more soon about what works with young at-risk dads⁸.

Number 6: Invest in trauma-informed care with allied professionals (that includes teachers, social workers, lawyers, and doctors). Studies have shown that adverse childhood experiences such as sexual assault, witnessing domestic violence, child maltreatment, and living in poverty can lead to serious social, economic, and health risks as adults⁹. To reduce the impact of trauma, the Government of Canada needs to invest in training that would support professional faculties, professionals in the field *and* their organizations to better understand the widespread impact of trauma and how to respond to it so they can help people heal.

Number 7: Develop, implement and evaluate a gender equality plan. The plan must include:

- *A comprehensive strategy* to ensure women have access to reproductive health care, including abortions.
- *Policies that facilitate* wage parity and a living wage that is enforceable across Canada.
- *A Parental Leave policy*, similar to Sweden's, which gives families up to 18 months of parental leave and makes a minimum six week parental leave mandatory for fathers.
- *Stronger pornography laws* similar to David Cameron's Family Friendly Internet filters that prevent children from seeing pornographic images.
- *A substantive increase* in funding for the Status of Women Canada - both for the department itself and for the funds that go to community-based organizations, strategies and action plans. Reinvest in women's organizations across this country to better support leadership, build momentum and ensure there is capacity to implement best and promising practices. Lastly,
- *Policies and strategies that foster women's leadership in all sectors of society.* Research shows, start-ups led by women are more likely to succeed; innovative firms with more women in top management are more likely to be profitable; and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cooper, M., & Wells, L. (2014). *Supporting young fathers. Research and recommendations for the Louise Dean program*. Available at: <http://preventdomesticviolence.ca/research/supporting-young-fathers-prevention-strategy-stopping-intimate-partner-violence>

⁹ Whitfield, C. L., Anda, R. F., Dube, S. R., & Felitti, V. J. (2003). Violent childhood experiences and the risk of intimate partner violence in adults: Assessment in a large health maintenance organization. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 18(2), 166-185.

companies with more gender diversity usually have more revenue, customers, market share and profits¹⁰. Investing in women's leadership in all sectors is crucial to achieving gender equality.

Number 8: Reduce dating violence by leveraging schools and school systems.

Implement evidence-based programs with grade 7, 8 and 9 students that are shown to reduce dating violence. Longitudinal research demonstrates the effectiveness of programs like the Fourth R, which is already in 4,000 schools in Canada (some funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada), in reducing dating violence, which *may* lead to a reduction in violence in relationships later in life^{11,12}. Our teachers and school systems need increased and better training to support children and youth to be in healthy relationships.

Number 9: Invest in a substantive and comprehensive long term social marketing strategy aimed at changing norms and behaviours that directly or subtly support violence against women. Recent events on university campuses tell us that, even after all the progress we've made, these kinds of ideas are still prevalent in our society.

Number 10: Provide sustainable funding focused on long-term initiatives. Short term, one-off funding will NOT get underneath this serious issue. Moving to long term funding and investing in research and evaluation will support better solutions.

It is privilege and an honour to present these ideas to the Committee today. Thank you for listening and for your commitment to ending violence against women in Canada.

¹⁰ Grant, A., & Sandberg, S. (2014, December 6). When talking about bias backfires. *The New York Times*. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/07/opinion/sunday/adam-grant-and-sheryl-sandberg-on-discrimination-at-work.html?>

¹¹ Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Zwarych, S., Hughes, R., & Wolfe, D. A. (2013). Predicting implementation success of an evidence-based program to promote healthy relationships among students two to eight years after teacher training. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, 32*, 125-138.

¹² Wolfe, D.A., Crooks, C.V., Jaffe, P.G., Chiodo, D., Hughes, R., Ellis, W., Stitt, L., & Donner, A. (2009). A universal school-based program to prevent adolescent dating violence: A cluster randomized trial. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 163*, 693-699.