



Economic Security for Women in Canada

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter

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The women's liberation movement has historically been and continues to be the most crucial and effective in advancing women's equality, addressing women's rights, advocating for reproductive freedom, and tackling the problem of men's violence against women. Rape crisis centers and transition houses were created by feminists throughout Canada in the 1970's during a period when women across the country were fighting to challenge the status quo of women's lives. Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter was the first rape crisis center in Canada, started in 1973, and has been operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, since then. We have responded to over 40,000 women who have experienced male violence against them. We know that men's violence against women is one of the most pervasive and strongest tools used to undermine women's equality in society. Women's poverty and economic insecurity compound women's disadvantaged status and continue to affect women disproportionately than men across the country. We see no way to advance women's equality without addressing men's violence against women and the impoverishment of women.

Women still get paid less than men. According to a Statistics Canada report from this year, Canadian women earned 74 cents for every dollar made by men yearly. Women spend more time doing unpaid labor within the home by caring for children and the elderly in addition to domestic housework. These constraints keep women overburdened and often reliant on precarious low paid jobs or the inadequate low income from social assistance. From the women who called Vancouver Rape Relief in one year, 40% requested immediate help to access basic necessities such as shelter, food, transportation, money, and childcare to avoid or escape violence from men.

Men Exploit Women's Poverty

Men's violence against women is used to control women; this violence can contribute to and sustain women's economic insecurity. We have advocated for women to be eligible for legal aid when their ex-husbands have threatened to drag them through court and take away their children. Men often have more money to hire legal representation while women must rely on duty counsel, the inadequate amount of free legal aid hours, or settle through mediation or other alternative processes that require her to comply with his demands and help maintain some of his control over her.

We have responded to young women aging out of foster-care who have been coerced into prostitution by boyfriends and pimps. Often even if a woman manages to leave the controlling boyfriend or pimp, it is much more difficult to exit prostitution because it entrenches her. The sex industry relies on men's demand to women's bodies and on women's economic desperation. Therefore, it is not uncommon for women who are poor and racialized (because of the overlap between race and class inequality) to enter prostitution.

Men control women by isolating women from their communities, restricts women's autonomy, interferes with women's access to basic necessities to live, and often erodes women's physical and mental health. Although women of all economic backgrounds experience violence from men, leaving relationships when poor is extremely difficult, sometimes impossible. Men's economic domination exasperates men's control over women.

Guaranteed Livable Income as a Tool to Promote Women's Equality

With a Guaranteed Livable Income, women would not have to be economically dependent on men. It would increase women's ability to resist exploitation and abuse from bosses, co-workers,

landlords, pimps and battering husbands. Women could care for their children without the threat of economic insecurity. Women would also be in a better position to negotiate with their male partners and family members to take on their share of the responsibilities of care and domestic work. Women could more meaningfully engage in community organizing and public life. With economic security, women could offer leadership in society and this would encourage women's equality.

We believe a Guaranteed Livable Income structured around these following principles will address the aims of the Status of Women committee, including improving the economic security of women, promoting women's leadership, and helping address the issue of violence against women.

Feminist Principles for Guaranteed Livable Income

A Guaranteed Livable Income must be set high enough to meet adequate standards of living. It should provide all basic necessities such as a nutritious diet, safe adequate housing, transportation, and allow for discretionary spending to enhance full participation in community life.

A Guaranteed Livable Income must be given unconditionally. This income should be given without a means test, without a job search requirement, without limitations on expenditures, without claw backs, without wait times or any other conditions. Welfare systems are set up to control those who are in need and aim to give as little as possible to as few people as possible. Guaranteed Livable Income will ensure all women are included and protected from economic insecurity.

A Guaranteed Livable Income must be given to all individual adults in a household regardless of marital status and must be enough to provide for each child that adult has guardianship over.

A Guaranteed Livable Income must be easily accessible regardless of people's locations.

A Guaranteed Livable Income must be available to refugees, immigrants married to sponsors, temporary foreign workers, and those applying for immigration status while in Canada.

All these conditions must be met to ensure that no one, let alone women are left vulnerable to economic hardship.

The Federal Government's Responsibility

It is the Federal Government's responsibility to ensure that all Canadian residents do not suffer poverty. More than 1.5 million women are living in poverty in Canada, many of these women are single mothers, according to Statistics Canada 2012 low-income report.

The Federal Government has made a commitment to advance gender equality for women, including a gender-balanced cabinet and some funding to women's shelters. Although we welcome these changes, they are long overdue and do not go far enough in creating true systemic change to the living conditions for women as a class in Canada.

The Federal Government needs to address the core issues of women's poverty by implementing a Guaranteed Livable Income that would address our most marginalized populations and ensure the economic security of all women in Canada.

Our Organization:

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter is committed to advocating for women's equality. These services include operating a 24-hour rape crisis line and transition house for women and children escaping male violence, support groups, volunteer training sessions, and public education events. The center works by challenging the social attitudes, laws and institutional procedures that perpetuate men's violence against women.