

INTERVAL HOUSE

Brief for Status of Women Committee's Study on the Economic Security of Women in Canada

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Interval House has been working tirelessly since 1973 as the first shelter in Canada for women survivors of intimate partner violence. We identified the economic security of these survivors as a necessary focus in order to transform their lives. Thus, we created the Building Economic Self-Sufficiency (BESS) Program in 1998.

Through the many years that we have worked with intimate partner violence survivors, we have learned the importance of addressing all of the factors you will be focusing on in the Study on the Economic Security of Women in Canada. From our experience, we have learned that it is imperative that, while you are researching the impact of these factors, you consciously apply the lens of how they impact survivors of intimate partner violence differently. Indeed, you will find that for these women, the impacts are exacerbated and magnified, thereby making economic security and leadership goals all the more difficult.

We recently conducted an assessment of the BESS Program and wrote a white paper on some of our findings called *Barriers to Employability and Employment for Women Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence* (which can be found on our website at <http://www.intervalhouse.ca/inside-interval-house/barriers-report>). The barriers to employability and employment, and thereby economic security and leadership, for women survivors of intimate partner violence are multiple and interlinked. The barriers interact with each other negatively and are experienced simultaneously to such a degree that the sheer number of barriers abused women face becomes an overarching barrier in itself.

Even with the numerous obstacles considered in our report, we have found that the primary barrier preventing women from moving forward is housing. Lack of affordable housing is central to inhibiting women's economic security. Without safe and affordable homes, no amount of opportunities afforded will change women's lives because their most basic needs are not being met. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) found that in 2016, the average market rent for a 2 bedroom unit in the Greater Toronto Area was \$1301. As the Ontario Works shelter allowance is merely \$695, private market rent is not feasible for many women escaping domestic violence.

Too many women choose to stay with abusive partners because leaving them often equates to guaranteeing poverty. It's promising that the main objective of the Status of Women Committee's study is to change this. But if the systemic barriers are not addressed, no amount of recommendations or strategies from the public will amount to real change.

Furthermore, once a woman has a place to live and can now turn her attention to finding a job, the issue of childcare becomes a real and often insurmountable barrier. The recent changes by the federal government to increase child benefits will play a key role in ensuring children are well taken care of with respect to food, health, etc. However, access to childcare is a major obstacle for most women.

Subsidized daycare, which is often seen as the solution for many women we work with, is at capacity. Waiting lists for these coveted spots are lengthy and therefore, looking for work is a great exercise in theory, but not reality. Moreover, even if a woman does secure daycare, subsidized or not, she must pick up her children by 6pm or run the risk of being charged \$5 for every minute that she is late. The 9-5 work week is no longer the norm for countless women. Many jobs require shift work and yet, women

will find they have to limit their job search to positions that require a 9-5 workday. But still, they are unable to compete with others, who can work late and put in overtime, because of inadequate childcare. Even women who work from 9-5 may find themselves subject to these penalties due to an inability to travel from their place of employment to the daycare in time using public transportation.

There are so many ways in which women survivors of intimate partner violence are impacted in more magnified ways than their counterparts on the road to economic security. Additionally, the barriers that survivors face can be further compounded by their other intersecting identities: as racialized or ethnic women, as immigrants or newcomers, as LGBTQ women, as women with disabilities, and as non-English speakers.

If the purpose of the Status of Women Committee's Study on the Economic Security of Women in Canada is to improve women's economic security and ensure the equal participation of women in the Canadian economy, then it is crucial that the barriers faced by survivors of domestic violence are addressed — in particular, the two areas of housing and childcare.

Therefore, the federal government has a responsibility to create viable and comprehensive National Housing and National Childcare Strategies. Only when the real barriers women face are addressed will they be able to have true economic security and reach their leadership potential.

Interval House Mission:

“As the first shelter for abused women and children in Canada, we are leaders in the campaign for women's empowerment, providing innovative, specialized services that help abused women and their children transform their lives and break the cycle of violence.”

Interval House Vision:

“We envision a world without violence against women.”

Interval House Values:

“safety, integrity, responsiveness, integrated services, independence, trailblazing, accountability, collaboration, awareness & diversity”