

Policy Brief: Economic Security Of Women In Canada

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To: The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Executive Summary:

Economic security for women in Canada has not yet been achieved. More than 1.5 million women in Canada are living in poverty and do not have a stable income or other resources necessary to support a healthy standard of living now and in the foreseeable future (Statistics Canada, 2012). Women make up two-thirds of part-time employees in Canada, and 59% of those women work for minimum wage (YWCA, 2014). 12% of the women who work part time state they do so because they are caring for children, and another 4% because of family responsibilities (Statistics Canada, 2014). This results in women having a disproportionally lower income, precarious employment, and living in poverty when compared with their male counter parts (YWCA, 2014). Factors that contribute to a higher incidence of poverty among women than men include violence against women, sexism and misogyny, and lack of government support (Strumm, 2015). Government funding for women's organizations, public education that works to change societal attitudes about women, and extensive social infrastructure are recommended to improve women's economic security in Canada.

Elements that influence women's income include:

- **Trauma from male violence. Trauma can make economic empowerment unattainable as the impact undermines women's ability to work. Furthermore, violence against women (VAW) is made worse by economic insecurity, as women living in poverty often cannot afford to leave their partners. If women are able to leave their abusive partners, VAW can lead to long term economic insecurity resulting in a reliance on food banks and shelters for support (CCPA, 2014). For many women, the high costs of living often result in a return to the abusive household they initially left.**
- **Sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape, and sexist beliefs in the work place impact a woman's mental and physical wellbeing and work to keep women economically oppressed.**
- **The pay gap. Women in Canada make 23% less than men, and this percentage only goes up for women of colour (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives [CCPA], 2013).**
- **Precarious labour. Canadian policy neglects casual, seasonal, or temporary employment as "Canada's employment equity has been designed to provide equality within standard work arrangements based on the full-time, permanent**

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model”(Busby, 2006, p. 55).

- **Child care needs and costs.**

Recommendations:

1. More Government funding for women’s organizations.

Violence against women directly impacts women’s ability to achieve economic equality. Women deserve to be able to access the essential services they require following a traumatic, violent experience. It is the government’s responsibility to ensure that these organizations are there when women need them most. Rape Crisis Centres, women’s transition houses, women’s mental health and addiction services all need to be a top funding priority if the government has a true interest in ending women’s economic inequality.

2. Public education that works to change societal attitudes about women.

The roots of women’s poverty can be found in the way that society values women in general. There must be prolonged, government funded public education that is centred on shifting discriminatory attitudes about women. Women do not have economic equality because they are not seen as equals. It is mandatory that this changes for women to achieve economic equality.

3. More social infrastructure.

Investment into social infrastructure such as childcare, health care, and education would work to create more jobs in women dominated fields. It would also alleviate women of the burden of unpaid labour that exists in a society that doesn’t value unpaid caregiving.

4. Guaranteed livable income.

Every woman deserves to live autonomously and with financial security. A guaranteed livable income provided for women by the government would alleviate the issue of women’s economic equality entirely and provide guaranteed food security and improved home security.

WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) Rape Crisis Centre is a non-profit charitable organization that formed in 1982 in response to the demand for support services for women who had been sexually assaulted. Our primary work is to provide direct services to all self-identified women who have been sexually assaulted, and work

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with community to end violence against women. For 34 years, we have worked with women and girls to heal following sexual violence, and for the prevention and end of all forms of violence against women. Our vision is a society where all women are free from violence. Today, we are British Columbia's leading sexual assault centre.

Sincerely,



Irene Tsepnopoulos-Elhaimer
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